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Margaret Shifton

IN A QUIET VILLAGE

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IN A QUIET VILLAGE

BY

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DAN'L COOMBE



DAN'L COOMBE

OLD DAN'L was a character indeed, and for many years a mystery as well. He was a man of one object in life, and what that object was no one knew for thirty-five years.

He was by trade a tailor, and throughout the hours of daylight he sat cross-legged on his table near a very large window, viewed by all who passed along the road, but scarce looking away from his work to exchange a nod with a passer-by.

He shaved his face clean, that is to say he shaved it occasionally clean, but this was once a week only, on Saturday, and during the ensuing week a dusky shadow stole over cheek and chin that made Dan'l look anything but clean-shaved. He wore his hair short, but had thick and very protruding eyebrows.

He was a reticent man.

The tailor's shop is often a place where many villagers congregate to have a chat, and the tailor is able to go on with his needlework in a mechanical fashion whilst conversing. But Daniel Coombe did not affect gossip and prattle; what he undertook he carried through with an almost grim persistency.

As the gamekeeper said : "Bless you, old Coombe, he do lay hold on and stick to a job just as a ferret do to a rabbit. There ain't no gettin' him to quit it."

Coombe had a wife—the ugliest woman he could have picked up, but they lived contentedly enough together. They had no children. Had they possessed a family, a little more brightness and laughter would have entered into the household. Mrs. Coombe was a grumbler; she grumbled over her husband, over her house, over her work, over every thing and every person with which and with whom she was brought in contact. But Dan'l did not appear to mind it. He lived in a world of his own—his thoughts, his aspirations ; and the mutter of discontent rumbled around him and rolled over his head, almost without his hearing it, certainly without his being moved by it.

No sooner was the sun set, and Dan'l could no longer ply his needle, than he put up his shutters. In these were two round orifices, and till late at night lamplight streamed forth into the road through these holes, that were as a pair of eyes glaring down the village street. What was he doing in his workshop at night ? Certainly he was not cutting out and sewing. It was a well-known saying of his that with the set of sun was the set aside of work.

"I ain't a-going to try my eyes and wear 'em out with needlework by lamplight," said he.

Then what was his occupation after nightfall ? Into his workshop he retired and bolted the door

from within as soon as he had taken his evening meal.

Did he read? Was he a student of English literature? Was he a politician? He was no buyer of books, and subscribed to no other paper than the local weekly gazette.

It puzzled the parish. It roused curiosity. Then some boys climbed up outside the window to peer in through the holes in the shutters, but the noise of their scrambling, perhaps the appearance of their visages in the openings, showed Dan'l that he was having his privacy peered into, and before the urchins were able to observe what his occupation was, out went the lamp. He had extinguished it. The married women of the parish endeavoured to extract the secret from Mrs. Coombe; but she was either ignorant or uncommunicative.

"How should I know?" said she. "He has his megrims. I don't meddle wi' they. All I know is, he ain't doing nothin' as is good to nobody. But if it keeps him out o' mischief and away from the public-house, naught I'll say."

Then the idea took hold that Dan'l was a wise man and could charm, stanch blood by his blessing, drive away warts, cure milk that would not turn to butter, and counteract ill wishes.

And to this he lent himself. He had not sought it. It was forced upon him. It might do good, he argued; it could do no harm. So his fame grew, and he was regarded with reverential awe. Whether he believed in his own efficacy as a healer, I cannot

say; his gifts of healing were bruited about, his failures passed into the limbo of oblivion. He did not set store on his reputed powers, he rather disparaged them, or shrugged his shoulders and professed scepticism over them, and he always said: "Well, if good comes of it, it is not from me—you must know that—but from the great Healer of all. Some cures wi' drugs, and some wi' their touch. There are differences of administration."

Dan'l Coombe was a regular churchgoer.

Woe betide the parson if, in preaching without a book, he quoted Scripture inaccurately. He became in time accustomed to find the tailor standing at the foot of the church steps awaiting him after service. Then would come the familiar touch of the hat, and, "I beg your pardon, sir, but did you not put in a *the* where there oughtn't to be, in that there text from St. Paul to the Corinthians?"

Or else: "Please, sir, did you use the right word in that there quotation from the Acts?"

"Dear Mr. Coombe, I took the marginal rendering."

"Oh, the margin. I don't hold by that."

Mr. Coombe was very much perplexed when the new version of the Scriptures was issued. It happily was not read in the parish church. I verily believe it would have driven him from it. "Nasty, lumpy thing," he said; "it is like eatin' bad-made porridge. Nothin' smooth about it. Bits come in your mouth and teeth at every moment."

He resented it as an immoral thing. "And to think," said he, "that Christian money should ha'

been spent by Government out of our pockets to put this here stumbling-block in the way of the blind! It's wicked, and I'll vote against Government next 'lection."

As already said, there had been an attempt made by scaling to peer in at the holes in Coombe's shutter, to see him at his nightly occupation. It had failed. After that he pasted two pieces of oiled paper over the openings, and thus prevented any further observations being made.

So time went on, and his neighbours became accustomed to the two yellow eyes, and no longer actively concerned themselves about his doings, though still a good deal of puzzlement remained about his nightly doings.

"To my knowing," said Mrs. Bacon to Mrs. Jones, "he had his lamp burning till half-past ten at night. Now he don't burn a lamp all that time for the sake of wasting oil."

"I'll tell you something more," said Mrs. Jones; "it isn't oil only as he consumes, it is ink as well. He has bought ten penny ink-pots, and one wi' red ink, at Miss Buck's shop in a twelvemonth. What do he want wi' so much ink? He can't drink it."

"He is writing a book. Take my word for it."

"A book! What about? He don't know nothing."

"Poetry, perhaps. A man may write that with his head empty. Every fool knows that."

"He don't look like a poet—not when he's unshaved."

"I'll tell you what—it may be his cures, and the way to strike wounds and white swellings."

"Ah! there, that is more likely."

And this purchase of penny pots of ink continued for thirty-five years. At the rate of ten a year, that would be three hundred and fifty pots of black ink. It was amazing. For what could he want so much ink? It was also ascertained that he sent by the carrier periodically to the market town for copy-books, and had them out in packets of a dozen at a time. What could he be putting into all those copy-books?

At last the mystery came out—not indeed to the whole parish, but into the ear of the rector was it revealed.

One Saturday evening the parson was informed that Mr. Coombe desired to speak with him very privately. The tailor was shown into the study. He brought with him a huge parcel strapped to his back.

Of this he relieved himself and placed it on the table.

"There, sir," said he, "my life's labour is accomplished. Now it is for the world."

"What is it, Mr. Coombe?"

"You shall see, sir, you shall see. For thirty-five years have I been engaged on it every night. I have gone over the work most carefully three and four times, and I am quite certain that there is not an error in it. It has been my great labour to be strictly correct. I do not believe there is a *the*

wrong. I began it thirty-five years agone last Friday, and last Friday I concluded it. Every man has his proper vocation and work to do. I found mine thirty-five years ago, and I have laboured at it unflaggingly since. It is done, and when the Lord pleases to call me, I shall be ready to go. But, sir—I don't mean to deny it—I should ha' been terrible sorry to ha' submitted to be called away before I'd done the job."

"I congratulate you on having accomplished what I am sure is a useful task. But what is it, Mr. Coombe?"

"You shall see, sir. You shall see."

He went to his parcel and undid the string. There appeared an enormous pile of copy-books. He took from the heap two of them, and brought them to the rector.

"There, sir," said he, "if you'd had this you would not have made—you'll excuse my saying it—such a terrible lot o' mistakes in quoting Scripture. It is, sir—IT IS—IT IS"—he raised himself and rubbed his hair up, then smoothed his fresh-shaven chin—"it is, sir, a dictionary of every word in Scripture, so that you have but to look out the word, and then you find where it comes in any book of the whole Bible."

His face glowed with triumph.

"Just think, sir, what a boon to ministers of the Gospel! Just think what a help to teachers! How ever can English folk have got along for all this time without such an aid as this? It is better, sir,

this, than conquering the Russians and taking of Sebastopol. It is grander this than Columbus discovering the New World. Now, what *do* you think, sir?"

"But, my dear Mr. Coombe——!"

"One moment, sir, and I shall have done. I intend to get it printed. It shall be 'Coombe's Dictionary of Bible Words,' and will become a handbook in every library of God-fearing and Scripture-loving men and women. As for any profits from the sale, of that I care not—that's no odds to me. It is the good it will do that I think of."

"But, my dear Mr. Coombe——"

The rector rose and went to his shelf.

"*The thing has already been done.* Here it is: 'Cruden's Concordance to the Holy Scriptures.' It was published in 1761, and has gone through innumerable editions since."

The old man stood as though turned to stone.

"The thing already done!" he gasped.

The rector had no heart to say more. He bitterly regretted that he had blurted out the truth so abruptly.

"The thing already done! Thirty-five years spent for naught."

Then he did up his packet again. But the tears dropped on it. This was to him a blow more crushing than he could bear.

He hoisted his parcel on his back, touched his forehead, but held the parson's hand and wrung

it, as speechlessly he left the house. His heart was too full for mere words.

The old man broke down rapidly after that. The object of his life was gone. The great ambition of his days was extinguished.

One day when he was being visited by the rector, as he lay on his death-bed, he said—

“Sir, I ha’ been thinking and worritting over my work o’ thirty-five years, and axing of myself whether it were all labour lost and time thrown away. It have fretted me terrible. But I seems to see now as it was not lost—not to me anyhow, for I got the Scriptur’ that into me that it became to me like the blood in my veins and the marrow in my bones—and it is my stand-by now.”



TIMOTHY SLOUCH



TIMOTHY SLOUCH

"MOTHER," said John French, "you say that everybody has his place in the world, and his mission. I'd precious like to know what is Tim Slouch's place and what his mission. It seems to me there never was such a chap for tumbling out of his place when he has got one, and bless'd if I know what good he can or does do, put him where you will."

John French was a fine young fellow, the only son of a small farmer lately deceased, unmarried, who carried on the farm and was the pride of his mother.

Very much about the same time the Squire, who was riding round his estate to see how the planting was going on, what cottagers wanted repairs done to their roofs, torn by a late gale, what farmers needed additional sheds—for he was a man to see to these things himself—encountered the parson, who had been parishing. He drew rein.

"How d'ye do, rector? I say, I say. There is that Timothy Slouch out of work again. Upon my soul, I don't know how the man could get on, were it not for Sela; and what the woman was thinking of when she took such a fellow—that

beats my comprehension. They say that to every man there is a hole in the world into which he may be pegged, but that hole has not yet been found by Slouch."

"I beg your pardon, Squire, he has found too many holes, and has never remained pegged into any one of them."

"True, true. But, I say, I say. They must not starve. Though, bless my soul, a little starving might drive Timothy home into the first peg-hole that offers; but Sela—my wife has a great regard for her. So I have set the fellow a job."

"And—what is that?"

"Well, I have given him the rhododendrons on the roadside and along the drives to peg down. It must be done, and now is the time. Surely he can do that. Fifteen shillings a week; and Sela picks up something."

"I hear he has had notice to leave his cottage."

"Yes—it is not mine, and—well, my agent has been peremptory with me. He says, 'Give him work if you will, but I forewarn you it is throwing good money away; but do not get him rooted in the parish, or you will never be rid of him.'"

"Well," said the rector, "he is not one of my sheep. He is in another parish, but Sela was—and why she married him—"

"Just what I say. But I say, I say—she was a poor girl, an orphan, and, I suppose, thought the man must find work, and would labour to maintain her."

"And now she has to maintain him. Whatever can be the meaning of heaven in sending such men into the world?"

It was the rector who said that, and next moment he reproached himself for having said it.

Timothy—Slouch was not his surname, it was Luppencott, but every one called him Slouch, as expressive of the man, his walk and way, not only on the road and at his work, but throughout life's course—Timothy had been brought up as a blacksmith, but had never advanced beyond blowing the bellows and hammering. He could do both, but not make a screw or bend a bar into a crook. All his experience had had no other effect than to convince his masters of his incapacity.

He lamed every horse he attempted to shoe, so that he was at once dismissed by the farrier to whom he offered his services. For a while he held a place as bellows-blower, at twelve shillings, but the blacksmith saw that he could get a boy at six who could do as well, and when Tim had the impudence to demand a full wage of fifteen the master dismissed him. "Tim," said he, "I only took you on because I thought I might get some work out of you at the anvil. Why, confound you, you cannot even make a nail!"

Then Slouch heard that there was a new line being made at a distance, and he offered his services on that. As blacksmith he was not needed, but he was engaged as a navvy. But he did not remain long there; he was speedily dismissed. He

did not arrive in time of a morning, he loitered over his work, and made other men loiter. What work he did, he did so badly that it had to be undone. So he came back, and brought no accumulation of wage in his pocket.

Next he offered himself to a blacksmith in a town distant ten miles, and was engaged. He kept the place about four months, returning to his wife every Saturday, and going back to his lodgings in the town on Sunday evenings. Then he was again out of work. He asked the Squire of the adjoining parish to give him employment. The reason why he was out of work was, said he, that what with the heavy rent he had to pay for his lodgings in the town, and what with the shoe-leather he wore out in his trudges to and fro, and on account of a sore foot, caused by an ingrowing nail on one of his toes, he was obliged to abandon his situation. Very likely this was all true, but it is also just as likely that the situation was closed up against him. His allegation was not inquired into. The Squire gave him his rhododendrons to peg.

"My dear," said the Squire to his wife, "I think he cannot go wrong there—and for Sela's sake we will give him the chance."

Sela had been a poor girl who had attended to her mother, a widow confined for six years to her bed, or to a chair, and who had been maintained by the parish and such alms as were sent from the rectory and the hall.

When, finally, the mother died and Sela was left

alone, she went into service at a farmhouse, where the mistress was somewhat of a termagant.

She did not long remain there, for Timothy Luppencott offered her his hand, his heart, and his hearth, and she accepted him. Sela had always been accustomed to poverty, and therefore did not shrink from the prospect of being the wife of a poor man. She had attended to a helpless mother; she found, when wedded, that she was tied to an almost helpless man.

Sela had been a good daughter, she was a good wife, and, in time, also a good mother. She had first one child and then another, and one of these proved rickety; very probably this was due to insufficiency of food. For Timothy when in work, and earning good wage, could not be relied upon to bring home a sufficiency for the support of his family. He was not a drunken man, but he went to the public-house, and he liked to enjoy himself. If there were a ploughing match, a harvest festival, a cricket match, a wild-beast show, a bazaar, Tim would be there. The work might go hang, he said, he must see the fun.

If Sela had seven shillings a week on which to clothe and feed herself and the children, she thought herself in luck's way. When she was able she went out charing; but when the children arrived she could not do this, and then dire distress came on her.

She had been a particularly pretty girl, and she was a very sweet-looking woman, with great, soft

brown eyes; but there was firmness about her lips.

Every one pitied Sela. She was as one born to trouble. She had a patient, suffering look about her brow and temples that told a tale of years of endurance and privation. But she did not murmur. She did not scold Tim. There was not the excuse for him, if he stayed at the tavern, that he was "jawed" at home.

"Really," said the rector's wife, "it is a satisfaction to give Sela any of the children's old garments. She is wonderful with her needle. I did feel almost ashamed to let her have little Mary's old school-dress, it was so frayed, so spotted, and so untidy. And will you believe it—her child was at church on Sunday in that identical gown! She had turned it, and contrived it in such a manner, that I could hardly believe my eyes. That is a woman to help, because every little help is put out to usury. But Timothy; oh, what a man he is!"

One Sunday, after service, the Squire awaited the rector as he left the church.

No sooner had the latter descended the avenue and the churchyard steps, than the Squire—with-out any other salutation than, "I say! I say!"—plunged into the matter that occupied his mind, and of which he desired to disburden himself.

"Rector, that Timothy Slouch."

"Well, Squire?"

"I say—I say, you know that I set him the rhododendrons to pin down."

"I know it."

"Will you believe me—he has made a mess of the job."

"I can believe a good deal of Slouch."

"He has actually split them so as to get the refractory branches down, and where he has pegged, and not torn asunder, has done it so inefficiently that when his work is effected, in twenty-five minutes they have slipped their pegs out, and are erect as before."

"How tiresome!"

"Yes, and he has half-ruined some of my choicest and most expensive varieties. He has riven and wrenched them about and knocked off the flowering buds. I was so angry I dismissed him. Not another day's work shall he have from me. I am sorry—for Sela's sake. But it cannot be helped."

For three weeks Tim lounged about, said he was looking for work; but if he did, looked for it in the wrong quarters. Then he appeared before the rector—not of his own parish, but the parson whose wife had befriended Sela, and said that he had heard of work in South Wales. He had a cousin there who was in a colliery, and who wrote that there was always a place for a handy man, and above all for a blacksmith.

"Well," said the rector hesitatingly—he saw what Tim was aiming at—"but exactly, are you the handy man?"

"I can turn my hand to anything. I have been in so many different situations. I have been black-

smith, and I have done farm-work, and recently, I may say, I have been a gardener."

"I daresay you can turn your hand to anything, but can you keep it where turned?"

"One can but try. Luck so far has been against me. My notion is, sir, if you would draw me up a brief, I will try to collect money to take me to Wales, and when there and have got a situation, I will send for my wife and children to live there with me; one must first have a nest into which to put one's doves."

"Quite so. Well, we will give you one chance more."

So the rector drew out a brief. It was cautiously worded; it contained a statement in accordance with Timothy's representations.

Then he headed the subscription list with a pound. The Squire was next approached, and he gave thirty shillings, and his wife another ten.

Timothy spent a fortnight in rambling about the country asking for money, and he probably collected something like ten pounds.

Then off he started and was not heard of for a month. Inquiries were made about him from Sela. She had received no letter from him. Moreover, it leaked out that Slouch had carried away with him in his pocket all the money subscribed, and had not left a penny with his wife.

This made the neighbourhood very angry, the most angry were those who had not subscribed. Those who had, began to fear they had been hoaxed,

but kept quiet; because no man likes to have it thought he has been imposed upon.

Presently, however, up turned Timothy. Work was slack in South Wales, he had been unable to find employ. The rector, very irate, sent for him, questioned him, and was convinced that the fellow had not been to Wales at all. He may have started with the intention of going there, that was all. The rector taxed him with it. Slouch was obliged, at last, to admit that he had not reached his destination. "You see, sir," said he, "I got half-way and then heard such bad accounts, as hands was bein' dismissed—that I thought it would be wasting money to go on."

"Then you have brought some money back?"

"Well, no, sir, I can't say I have. It comes very expensive travelling. But if your honour would be so good as to draw me up another brief—"

Then the parson flushed very red and bade the man be gone. Not another scrap of help should Slouch have from him.

And, indeed, Timothy found the whole district up in arms against him, and ready to kick him out of it, and would have done so—only that it pitied and respected Sela.

"Out he must go," said the Squire. "He had notice to quit at Lady Day, and on Lady Day he goes and into no cottage of mine shall he come."

Whither did he go? He wandered seeking shelter; every house was refused, till he came to John French.

A few hours later, Mrs. French exclaimed: "John! you don't mean to tell me that you have let those good-for-naughts—the Slouches—into your cottage?"

"I have, mother, they cannot lie in the road under a hedge, and they were turned out to-day. Timothy has, at last, found an occupation—he is taken on to break stones for the road. He cannot go wrong in that. It is what any fool can do. As to the cottage, it is unoccupied, and has been for a twelvemonth. I have let him move his few sticks of furniture into it, and he is to pay me a weekly rent of a shilling. There is a bit of garden——"

"Which he will neglect."

"Sela kept the garden where they were before, and she will attend to this. She has poultry."

"Well—may you not regret it."

So Sela and Tim and the children were admitted into French's cottage, and with them moved a great number of cocks and hens, geese and ducks. Sela was a clever woman with fowls. Indeed, it was through her poultry that she had maintained herself and children, and had paid the rent. She sold eggs to the regrater every week, and spring chickens were readily purchased by the gentry around.

When it was known that the Luppencotts were given a new spell of occupation in the neighbourhood, that neighbourhood sighed, and said with one voice, "Well, we *did* think we were quit of Slouch, but we should have been sorry to lose Sela."

Now it might have been supposed that on the roads, cleaning water-tables, scraping, in winter breaking stones, in autumn spreading them, gave work that it was not possible for Slouch to fail to execute satisfactorily. In fact, he was seen for one entire winter engaged on stone heaps, with a long-handled hammer cracking stones.

But then the heaps knew him no more. He was again out of work. He had thrown it up in a fit of spleen, because an old man was employed as well, to save his "coming on the parish," and this Timothy regarded as a slight. Added to this, he heard that a new blacksmithery was being started in an adjoining parish, and, sanguine that he could obtain occupation there, he threw up his engagement on the roads before he had secured that at the forge.

And, naturally, he did not get the place on which he had calculated. He was too well known to be given it. Then ensued the familiar ramble in quest of employment, but no farmer, no landowner would give him any.

The family would have starved, but for Sela and her poultry. She did not make much by her fowls, as corn was dear, but they had, and were allowed, the run of the fields and arishes of John French. Then, also, she got plenty of skimmed milk from the farm, that was only a halfpenny per quart, and with milk none can starve. Sela had gleaned at harvest, and gleaned sufficient wheat to make bread for herself and children.

Mrs. French often saw her—sent for her to assist in cleaning the house, gave her a spare-rib when she killed a pig—showed her many little kindnesses. But the old woman had, as she said, no patience with Tim, and with him would not change a word.

Sela had a cool and clean hand, and was invaluable in butter-making. That Mrs. French ascertained; so in this new cottage the Slouches got on well, but no credit attached to Tim for that.

One day Tim was climbing along a rafter of an old outhouse in quest of eggs, as one of his wife's hens had stolen a nest, when the rafter snapped—it was rotten—and down fell Tim on his head, and broke his neck. He was taken up dead.

The entire neighbourhood at once rushed to one conclusion: "It is just as well. He never was of any use to any one when alive."

And once again John French said to his mother: "There's an end of him, and I'd precious like to know what was Tim's place in the world, and what his mission?"

And the rector said to the Squire, after the funeral, "Well, at last poor Slouch has found the hole in which he must stick. I have wondered, and do wonder still, what he was sent here for."

A year passed, and to the surprise of most people, John French married Sela Luppencott.

"It's a wonderful lift in life for her," said some.

"But it is such a come down for him," said others.

What John French said of it was this. He said it to his mother: "Do you mind what I asked some time agone about that Tim Slouch; whatever could have been his work and mission in the world? It often puzzled me. But I have found it out. He was the making of Sela. His very helplessness made her industrious, his thriftlessness made her saving, his dreadfully trying ways made her patient and enduring, his imprudence made her foreseeing. I do believe the work and mission of that fellow was just this—to make for me the very model and perfection of a farmer's wife, and then to break his neck."

"Aye," said Mrs. French; "and the way he shifted about till he'd settled down close by us. 'Twere all ordained, I believe."

"Upon my word," said the rector one day to the Squire, "the proper thing to do, Tim has done at last: to break his neck and leave his widow to John French."

"Aye," replied the Squire, "and Tim has found his hole at last into which he will remain pegged."



DOBLE DREWE



DOBLE DREWE

DOBLE DREWE was plumber, glazier, paperhanger, and house-painter; chiefly plumber, but also a most excellent house-painter.

Whatever Doble undertook in his profession he executed in the very best manner. If any fault appeared, it was in the quality of the material used, not in his use of it; and, consciously, he never would employ for his work any material but what he believed to be the very best. He spared himself no pains, he cut no time short over his work. The work he undertook, he undertook to do as well as it was possible for him to execute it, and I really believe he had not his superior in his own line in England, and if not in England then certainly not in Europe, and if not in Europe then—it goes without saying—not in the round world.

But he took, it must be conceded, a very long time over his task. Most persons who employed him lost patience because he was so slow. But slow he was not when one considered the quality of his workmanship. He scamped nothing. When he painted even a railing, he took infinite pains to holystone the wood till he had cleaned off every particle of old paint and had got the wood perfectly

smooth. And each coat of paint was laid on with the greatest nicety. There was a carved oak table that once stood in our drawing-room. The fashion had set in for satin-wood, so the room was done up, doors, cabinets, tables, all to look like satin-wood. And all was done by Doble Drewe.

Most lovely make-believe satin-wood he produced. That was before the days of the "Seven Lamps of Architecture," when Mr. Ruskin turned his bull's-eye on shams, and showed that they were morally wrong. At the period of which I write everything *must* be a sham or it was not fashionable. Wood was painted to look like marble, and cement to imitate wood.

Well—about this carved table.

The other day I sent it to a furniture-dealer to remove the paint and develop the oak.

After a while it returned to me, and with it came the bill.

"Really, sir," said the dealer, "I am ashamed at having asked so much, but it is incredible what labour it has taken my men to clean that table. Never saw nothing like it before. The paint simply wouldn't come off. It was like taking the skin off a living man."

"Ah!" said I, "Doble Drewe's work."

But if Doble was slow over his tasks, he was slower in sending in his bills. Why he did not make them out and transmit them to his customers till three, four, even six years had elapsed, I cannot tell, but it is a fact. And this lost him customers

who could pay, because they did not relish having to give out money over items every one of which had passed from their memories. The only customers he gained were those thriftless creatures who did not want to pay there and then, and who hoped they might be more flush of money in a few years' time than they were in the present. And some of his customers died, others became bankrupt, or left the neighbourhood without leaving their addresses, before Doble Drewe's bills were ready. I know that mine came in for work done for my father five years after my father was dead, and I had thought all had been settled, probate paid, with deductions for bills, and Doble's, of course, not deducted because I did not know it was due.

Now although scrupulously conscientious over his plumbing and glazing, his paper-hanging and painting, and though whilst on his work he had all his faculties engaged upon it, yet Doble had a soul for something very much above lead and paint and putty.

I found it out one day in this wise.

My mother had a marvellously lovely voice, and she was sitting in the drawing-room that had been satin-wooded, at the piano playing and singing, whilst Drewe was in the hall labouring at painting the panels to look like pollard willow, stippling, brushing, graining, putting in plenty of knots where no knots really were, and running the grain across the direction where its course by nature lay.

I happened to be in another part of the hall to

that where was the painter on his knees engaged at his work. He did not know that I was there—so quiet was I, engaged on Captain Maryatt's "Snarley Yow, or the Dog Fiend."

If I remember aright my mother was singing Haynes Bayley's "We met, 'twas in a crowd."

It was not a song for a soprano or for a woman, and though she went through with it, seemed unsatisfied, put the book away and was for a while engaged in finding another piece.

I thought I heard a sound from the corner where the painter was. I looked up from "Snarley Yow," but seeing nothing particular, looked again at the entrancing book.

Then my mother broke out in the song from the "Creation," "With verdure clad."

Before she had got half-way through I was sure that I heard something from Doble. It was a sob.

I stood up—but he put back his hand to stay me as I approached.

I waited till my mother's singing and the chords of the piano had ceased to vibrate, and then I said to him :

"Are you unwell, Mr. Drewe? Is there anything I can get for you?"

He had a choke in his voice, and I saw as he turned that his cheeks were wet with tears.

"Excuse me, young gentleman," said he. "Don't mind me. I cannot help it. Indeed, indeed, I cannot refrain. When I hear music, good, beautiful music, it makes me cry like a woman—like a woman."

You'll excuse me. Go on with your book and don't mind me."

I had many a talk with the plumber after this, and I found that it was so with him. When he heard good music he passed into a transport, an ecstasy. But then, how seldom it was that he did hear and could hear good music! He lived in a little village some ten miles from a town, and that a sleepy, stagnant country town, and no railway within thirty miles.

Nowadays we have in our little centres all over England good choral societies, and concerts are given not only by amateurs, that may sing well, but often only think that they do so, but also by touring professionals.

It was not so when I was a boy. Then there were no such things as choral unions and concerts, out of the capital of the county, that was accessible only by coach.

Then locomotion was not easy; and the utmost length of a villager's journey was to the market town and that only on a market day.

At that time the parish church indeed had its orchestra and its choir, but oh! what appalling, agonising productions were the concerted pieces there produced.

Poor Doble Drewe suffered acutely when an instrument was out of tune, and a piece played out of time; and when were all the instruments in the west gallery either in tune or in time the one with the other?

Doble's sole ambition was to obtain a piano, and he did purchase one out of the savings of many years, to discover that he was powerless to play it, that his ardent musical soul could not relax his stiff fingers and enable them to play even a simple piece. He had not learned as a boy, and now it was too late. "Now look you here," said Doble. "This is a terrible disappointment to me, but I'll not be beat. I'll have good music in my house somehow. I'll marry a wife, and get a little boy or girl; it don't matter which, and I'll have that there child taught so soon as ever it has the sense to know its notes; and when I'm an old man I'll just sit by the fire and listen, and my lad or my little maid shall play to me by the hour. I'll have Handel, and Haydn, and Bishop, and Mozart. Ah! them will be times worth living for. I'll go about it at once."

And he did. He married a young woman, not because she could play a piano, for at that period there were none to be had in his walk of life who could finger an instrument, but with the prospect of becoming a parent of one who could be educated into a skilful player.

"You see," said he, "there is the piano. All it wants is some one to play on it. It is only a matter of waiting some fifteen or eighteen years, and then—then my time of enjoyment will have come. Then—then I shall have music."

But no. Again he encountered disappointment. No child was given to him, and the wife he had selected, instead of producing harmony in the home,

was a fruitful source of discord. She had a tongue and she had a temper, and she was no idealist, and could not abide just those two things which made Doble what he was—a painstaking, scrupulous workman, and withal a dreamer.

"Why, Doble," she would say, "what's the good of your doing your jobs so slow and so fine? There's other chaps get twice the work you do by just slurring along."

"I cannot do other. It would go against my conscience."

"And as to your dratted music. You ain't got none, and you can't have none, so just lump it and be joyful."

To that he made no reply. No answer he could have made would have been comprehensible by her.

So time went on.

Doble's back became bent. His look became more abstracted. His was an earnest face, with a questioning, craving, seeking look upon it.

Then came a chance.

In the cathedral city the "Messiah" was to be performed, and the choir of the minster were to take part, also sundry amateurs, and Formes and Albani were to sing.

I gave myself a treat. I went up, and took the plumber with me.

I do not think that Drewe had any conception of what massive chorus singing could be, or what cultured voices could effect in solos. Remember, he never had heard good music in his own village;

only direful failures to achieve something that was supposed to be music. His only—I really believe his only previous acquaintance with good singing was his hearing my mother sing.

As to describing how Doble looked through that concert, I cannot. He was as one not himself, rigid, rapt, not of this earth, with the great tears rolling down his thin, worn cheeks; he sat with his hands folded between his knees and never moved—no more than had he been of stone.

Nor did Doble speak much after it; he went back to his lodging as in a dream.

And as we returned by coach next day he was reticent. I knew what was passing within the man, and did not tease him with questions, but as he left the coach at his door, he squeezed my hand and said : "Sir, I shall live on *that* all the rest of my days."

In after years I have often pondered over Doble. It has seemed to me one of those unfathomable mysteries of life that there should be in a poor little country village a man created by God, endowed by God with high-strung musical faculties, yet absolutely incapacitated by position and circumstances for making any use of his great gift, for deriving any enjoyment from it. Why was not Doble placed somewhere else ? Why was Doble given a faculty he could not use ?

Many years passed, and I was cast into a far distant portion of England, yet I may say that this problem continually troubled me.

Once I came across a farmer's wife in a low and peculiarly ugly portion of the East coast of England, and she had the same sort of craving soul after beautiful scenery. "I feel," she said to me once, "as though I would like to look on the Alps—and die."

It is the same throughout the world of men. It must have been so through countless ages. There must have been Mozarts and Purcells in the ages that were before musical instruments were made, and the laws of harmony laid down and concerted music was made possible. Hundreds and thousands of Doble Drewes over all the earth and in all time. A mystery! A perplexing problem I could not solve. It haunted me. It distressed me.

A few years ago I was at my old home, and I was talking to the curate of the parish in which Doble Drewe had lived:

"So," said I, "poor old Drewe is dead."

"Yes, and buried."

"I wish—"

"You were not in this neighbourhood then?"

"No. Tell me something about the old fellow."

"I really do not think I have anything to tell."

"Was his wife a little less nagging as he grew older and faded away?"

He shook his head. "Tongues grow sharper the more they are used."

"And—at the last? Had he much pain?"

"I was with him when he died. The woman was quiet then. He lay for some hours as though

insensible, and I thought the end might be at any moment. All at once he moved, held up his hand, assumed a listening attitude, a wonderful light and smile broke out over his face; he seemed to be hearkening attentively. Then he said, 'Now,' laid his head on the pillow, and was dead."

That night, after the curate was gone, I rocked in my chair, musing, looking into the fire. I muttered, "Poor old Doble!" then after a pause, said, "Happy Doble!" and then, "Now I also understand."

Thereupon I took down a little book I had of Dr. Alexander's poems, and read:

"Down below, a sad mysterious music,
Wailing through the woods and on the shore,
Burdened with a grand majestic secret,
That keeps sweeping from us evermore.
Up above, a music that entwineth
With eternal threads of golden sound,
The great poem of this strange existence,
All whose wondrous meaning hath been found."

MARY TREMBATH



MARY TREMBATH

THIS is a sketch—no more—of a woman who was to me, and is still, a problem for a casuist to solve. How so, you shall hear in the sequel. But, to begin, you must know her life's story.

Mary was, when a young married woman in a Cornish fishing-village, occupying a cottage at some little distance from the harbour. She must have been a fine woman then, she is fine in her old age.

"Ah!" said she, "you have been to Maker? Did you go about in a boat there?"

"Yes." I had boated whilst staying in the place.

"And did you see the Lady Rock?"

"Yes, it was pointed out to me."

"And the Dead Man's Rock?"

"I think so."

"Well, it is all along of the Lady Rock that I was a widow."

"How so?"

"You have heard tell about the Lady?"

I had. The Lady is a little piece of white feldspar in a cliff that rises out of the sea, with a shelf before it, and this piece of quartz or feldspar bears a singular resemblance to the shape of a woman draped in white. Whenever the fishermen return

with their trawls, they cast a few of the mackerel or herring they have caught on to the shelf before the White Lady, and, unless this be done, this oblation made, ill-luck will attend the fishermen on their next expedition; their nets will be caught and torn as by invisible hands in the deep, or no fish will enter the seines, or, worse still, the boat will capsize and possibly the fishermen on board will be drowned. The Dead Man's Rock is another portion of cliff nearly horizontal, sometimes washed by the waves, and on this lies a mass of the same white spar, bearing something approaching the form of a corpse. But it demands more fancy to distinguish the corpse than the Lady.

"I will tell you the whole story, sir," said Mary. "My husband, Thomas Trembach, was a fine standing-up man as you'd see anywhere. He was a fisherman, and a daring fellow. I don't say he did not do a bit of smuggling now and then, but, lor', sir! they all did, and if they didn't, more shame to them, with their opportunities. Well, sir, I don't say he was a Free-thinker, because he wasn't, but he was a sort of no-thinker—no ways, if you can understand me. Well then, one day, as they was coming in after there had been a shoal, there was a lot of boats out that day, and as the boats went by, all the cap'n's threw a few whiting on to the ledge afore the Lady. But my Thomas he was a daring unconsiderate chap, and they'd caught a young dog-fish that day —the fishermen sometimes bring 'em home and gets a few pence by showing 'em, for they're terrible

mischievous beasts, and eat a lot of mackerel and whiting and just anything they can. Well, sir, will you believe it, when Thomas comes alongside of the Lady Rock, what did he do, in a fit o' daring, but heave the dog-fish on to the shelf afore her!"

Mary paused and looked at me, expecting me to appear aghast at such an outrage.

"The other men, they was astounded and afraid after that—no man would go in the boat with him. And next time he wanted to go, they shook their heads, and said they weren't going to court ill-luck. So Thomas—he was that reckless and regardless—he said he would go alone. And go alone he did. There was no wind and the sea was smooth—but he never came back. I reckon he alone couldn't manage the boat and something went wrong. What it was I can't tell—but he never came back. That's what followed chucking of a dog-fish at the White Lady."

After her husband's death, Mary took to peddling. She was a middle-aged woman when I knew her, stoutly built, broad shouldered, with a hale and ruddy face; she wore short skirts, a man's long greatcoat over her back, and a man's hat on her head. Slung across her shoulder by a strap was a case that contained needles, thread, pins, and tape. She carried a staff, some four feet long, in her hand, not of bamboo but of ash, and she strode along the roads faster than a horse could walk.

There was not a farm, not a cottage within miles

around, in which Mary was not known, and where she did not do business.

How she picked up a living on the things she sold was a marvel to me. The profits on each item can have been only small, and the amount of country she travelled over to sell these little articles was so great, that she must have worn out much shoe-leather.

She was abroad in all weathers and at all hours.

I said to her one day: "Why, Mary, are not you afraid in the lone lanes, at night?"

"Lor', sir, not I. If there were a man as were imperent, I'd lay my stick across him, and he'd bite the dust. And as to spirits, I never meddles with them, and so they don't meddle with me."

"Spirits! Why, you never have the chance of interfering with their little games."

She shook her head. "I won't say that, sir," she answered. "There's queer things about at night, but I always gives 'em a good word and a text of Scriptur', and they don't hurt me."

It used to be thought that a comet presaged war, that its tail tickled all the elements of irritation in the world and sent nations and kingdoms flying at one another. But this human comet, Mary Trembach, revolving in her elliptical orbits through the country, left peace and goodwill after her. She was an inveterate gossip, a chatterbox. She loved, when she had sold a paper of pins or a knot of tape, to sit and have a dish of tea and a bit of cake and talk, but never, so far as I am aware, did evil

spring from what she said; on the contrary, she left those she had been with better disposed towards one another than they had been before.

A somewhat singular instance of this occurs to my memory.

There were two old ladies, spinsters both, who lived within a mile and a half of each other. One was the housekeeper to her brother, a farmer, who was a widower, and the other resided in a pleasant cottage of her own, surrounded by trees, smothered in laurels and snowberries that cut off sun and air, and made garden and house smell of mildew and moth. Now this old lady had a sharp tongue and a lively imagination, and had the credit of being a mischief-maker.

All at once a tremendous feud broke out between these spinsters. It involved more than themselves, their relations, their acquaintances also, in the village. Miss Spindle had said something very nasty and galling of Miss Shank that was absolutely untrue, but so injurious that Miss Shank vowed she would have the law of her.

Hearing of this, and finding the entire village agitated by the controversy, I tried to discover the truth—whether Miss Spindle really had spoken such cruel things of Miss Shank. I tracked the story from one to another, and found that gradually every objectionable expression and statement fell off *en route* as an assertion, and that what had actually been said was entirely harmless, for it was not said of Miss Shank at all, but of the shank-bone

of mutton on which Miss Spindle had been making her meal. In fact, all this good lady had said was, that the shank had been served so often that it was becoming high and discoloured, and had best be hashed. Out of this a mountain of malignant insinuation and defamatory assertion had been evolved.

When I had got to the bottom of the story, I rushed off to Miss Shank to explain that the whole thing was a misunderstanding, and ought to be put aside, and peace made. But the lady was furious ; she turned on me as a mischief-maker and a meddlesome person for having dared to interfere.

She knew that what Miss Spindle meant was to cast slurs at her, and she employed the mutton-bone as a subterfuge so as to avoid prosecution. There it was, worse than ever. I was out with one. I went to Miss Spindle. She was exasperated because Miss Shank had dared to believe that what she had spoken about the mutton applied to her, and she broke into a torrent of abuse of me for interfering in the matter.

There it was ; I was out with the other.

As I retired disconsolately, I ran across Mary Trembath, and somehow, for my heart was full, I told her of my ill success.

“Leave it to me,” said Mary.

What was my amazement next Sunday to see Miss Spindle and Miss Shank embracing in the churchyard after service, and walking off arm-in-arm and chatting affectionately together !

How had this transformation in the women, this change in the situation, been brought about? Only with difficulty did I get at the bottom of it. Mary, whilst selling a hank of coloured wool to Miss Spindle, had contrived to hint to her that Farmer Shank, the widower, was terribly concerned over the quarrel, as he was actually much enamoured of the fair spinster who lived in the bower of laurels.

Then, Mary Trembath had gone to the farm of the Shanks, and had let out in confidence that Miss Spindle's conscience so pained her over the mischief done, that she was sending for the lawyer to alter her will and make over Laurel Cottage and her few hundreds in the Three per Cents. to the woman she had so grievously injured.

When I learned this, I thought I would have it out with Mary. She pulled a face as I reproached her.

"Please, sir, I didn't say it was so; I merely hinted such a thing might be. They jumped at the conclusion, and turned what might be into it is so."

"But, Mary, it was not true."

"How do you know that, sir?—all things are possible."

That was Mary Trembath's secret way of making smooth water wherever she went. She was not a deliberate liar, even for a good purpose; but she managed somehow to create impressions that served to bring quarrels to an end, to make people once indifferent to each other become fast friends, and

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to dispel pretty nearly every cloud that hung over a parish in which she peddled.

And now you will see how it is that, as I said, she provided me with a problem only a casuist can solve. Of course, it is never right to speak an untruth even for a good end. Mary was too conscientious to say straight out what was false, but she had a clever, subtle manner of bewildering people through her hints and suggestions, till she induced them to deceive themselves, and that always with a good object in view.

She was a peacemaker, eminently a peacemaker, but was she justified in the method she employed to make peace ?

THE OLD POST-BOY



THE OLD POST-BOY

ONE of the most characteristic and interesting features of old English life has passed away beyond recall—the post-boy. Whatever his age he was always a boy, for he always wore the short jacket. His *confrère* the postillion has lasted on somewhat longer on the Continent, but he also is nearly gone. He was a picturesque feature, very different from the dapper English post-boy.

The latter figures in most old English romances. He took a part in all elopements, and was concerned in the conveyance of Queen's Messengers with despatches; he was suspected of affording information to and furnishing opportunities for highwaymen.

Who does not remember the flight of Jingle with Miss Rachel, in "Pickwick," and the pursuit by Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick?

But the post-boy has taken more than a subsidiary part in a story, he is the hero in Smollett's "Humphry Clinker," and he figures as a leading part in the opera of "Le Postillon de Longjumeau." His place now knows him no more. He is as extinct an animal as the dodo or the great auk.

The last I knew was fallen from his old estate—

a slim, grey-haired man, who drove a hired carriage, but no longer mounted one of a pair of post-horses. At weddings the post-boy made his final appearance, with a white beaver hat, a yellow jacket and white breeches and top-boots, a showy individual, and poor old George Spurle, whom I knew, had appeared in his proper character on many such occasions before leaving the saddle altogether to mount the box. His jacket was of a buttercup yellow, but other colours were indulged in by these servants of the public. Humphry Clinker wore "a narrow-brimmed hat with gold cording, a cut bob [wig], a decent blue jacket, leather breeches, and a clean linen shirt, puffed above the waistband."

Old George, like every other post-boy I have known, loved his horses. In his old age he loved them too well, spared them so much as to annoy those whom he was conveying, and who proved impatient at his walking them up the least hill, and at his frequent dismounting to ease his brute.

There was a grey mare he was specially fond of, and one night the grey got her halter twisted about her neck and was found strangled. George Spurle sat down and fairly cried. The landlord seeing him so cut up endeavoured to comfort him.

"George," said he, "do not take on so. After all it is only a horse, and that an old one. If you had lost a wife, that would have been a different matter altogether, and there would have been some excuse for tears, but—a horse—" "Ah, maister," replied the post-boy, "wives!—one has but to hold

up the finger, and they'd come flying to you from all sides—more than you can accommodate; but an 'oss—and such a mare as this—booh!" and he burst into tears again. "Such a mare as this is not to be found again in a hurry." When a little subdued, he explained himself: "You see, maister, 'osses cost money, good 'osses cost a power of money, but wimen wifes—they don't cost you a ha'penny piece."

George Spurle kept a list of all the great persons he had ridden before, and his list is before me as I write. Unhappily he has not dated his several stages, and his spelling makes his MS. sometimes hard to unravel.

For instance, "Druv the Duck of Dangle'em" apparently means le Duc d'Angoulême, and "the Count D. Parry" is le Comte de Paris. After a long list beginning with royalty, he winds up, "Members of the American legation and Van Amburgh's lions and tigers in American vans. Lunatics and hospital patients with fractured limbs, gold bullion, convicts in vans, also naturalists and gaiests [*sic*] to be married, the junior of springs [*sic*] two months old and an aged person living ninety-four years, the oldest to the grave a hundred years and six months. Adventurers, photographers, explorers of Mont Blanck [*sic*] and Africa. Comercials [*sic*], astronomers and philosophers and popular auctioneers, Canadian rifles, American merchants, racehorses in vans with gold caps. Mackeral [*sic*] fish and several deans and bankers. Paupers

to onions [*sic*], some idjots and Sir H. Seale Hayne Bart."

The old post-boy was never married. Before the days of railways he was in constant request, but the whirligig of time brought about its changes that touched George Spurle to the quick, and thrust him from his seat.

He had begun life as a little urchin perched on the back of the waggon horse that had brought in the wheat at harvest, and this had so raised his ambition that nothing would content the child but becoming a postboy. The scarlet of the Queen's livery presented no attraction to him, nor the blue jacket of the navy. Nothing would do but the stable with the anticipation of wearing at some time the yellow jacket and white beaver. When not in the stable, he was to be found in the bar, where he told many a yarn. Here is one. "Gentlemen—I cannot tell you precisely the year, but it was at the very beginning of the century that there was a rather remarkable robbery of the mail, going from Exeter to Plymouth, near Haldon. A party of fellows with black over their faces sprang out of the bushes, and were all armed with pistols. They stayed the coach, and they got the letter-bags and carried them off. Now I was here—some fifteen miles away—and somehow I saw it all take place; I saw and counted the men—that is, in my dream, for I was sleepin' in the little chamber over the stable; and I saw the men take the bags off to a quarry and there they ripped 'em open, and searched and took away some

of the letters, and left the rest. I see'd it all distinct as daylight, though it took place in the night. Well, when I came down in the mornin' and had washed at the pump, I went into the bar and I told Mary Foale about it; she was maid there then, and I was a bit sweet upon her. She laughed and thought nought on it. Then I went on and told the mistress of the inn, but, bless you! she gave no heed. Well—gentlemen, you may believe me or not, as you please; but it's true enough, the mail had been robbed during the night, on Haldon, just as I had described, and we didn't hear the news till the afternoon of the day—and I told all about it in the morning early. But that is not all. The mail-bags were not found for ten or twelve days, and they were in the old quarry just where I had seen the chaps cutting them open. That is a coorious story, ain't it?"

"Indeed it is, George. It almost looks as if you had been riding that night and had been in it."

"Ah! I'm not that sort of chap. Now there was a sequel to it."

"What was that?"

"Why, a day or two arter I asked Mary Foale if she'd condescend to be Mrs. Spurle."

"No thank y', George,' sez she; 'you see too much to make it comfortable for me.' And she didn't take me, she took Jeremiah Ancker; and that just shows she didn't see enough, for he turned out a drunken lout as whacked her."

"Were you ever robbed on the road, George?"

"I've been stopped, but on that occasion things didn't turn out as was intended."

"How so?"

"I'll just tell 'y', gentlemen. There was some bullion to be sent up to London from India. It had been landed at Falmouth. Now the authorities had some suspicion, and so they didn't send it the way as was intended. I had orders quite independent—I knowed nothing about it—to go to Chudleigh; I reckon there was a gentleman there as wanted me to drive him across the moors to Tavistock, and he knowed he could rely on me. He was to start early in the morning, so I drove in the direction in the evening before, with a close conveyance, as I knew there might be rough weather and rain next day going over the moors.

"I hadn't got half-way when I was stopped by a man on horseback with his face blackened. He held a pistol and levelled it at my head; I had no mind to be shot, so I pulled up. In a rough voice he asked me who was in the chaise. 'No one,' said I. 'But there is something,' said he. 'Nothing in the world but cushions,' I replied. 'Get down, you rascal,' he ordered. 'You hold my horse, whilst I search the chaise.' 'I'm at your service,' said I, and I took his horse by the bridle, and as I passed my hand along I felt that there were saddle-bags. Well, that highwayman opened the chaise door and went in to overhaul everything. I had made up my mind what to do. So while he was thus engaged I undid the traces of my 'osses with one

hand, holding the highwayman's 'oss with the other.

"Presently he put his head out, and said, 'There is nothing within—I must search behind.' 'Search where you will,' said I, 'you've plenty o' time at your disposal.' And so saying I leaped into his saddle. Then I shouted, 'Gee up and along, Beauty and Jolly Boy!' and struck spurs into the flanks of the horse, and away I galloped on his steed with my two chaise horses galloping after me; and we never stayed till we came to Chudleigh."

"And the saddle-bags?"

"There was a lot of money in them—but there's my luck. That fellow had robbed a serge-maker the same night, and this serge-maker came and claimed it all."

"But you were handsomely rewarded?"

"He gave me a guinea and the highwayman's 'oss, and that same 'oss is the old grey mare, gentlemen, as folks ha' laughed at me for weeping over when she were hanged. Now it is a coorious sarcumstance that so far as I know that there highwayman went scot free to his grave, and the poor innocent grey were hanged."

George Spurle lived to an advanced age, but he was one of those men whose age it is hard to determine: his face was always keen and his eye bright, he had a ruddy cheek, was always closely shaven, and his grey hair cut short. Till he died he drove a conveyance belonging to the inn; he could not be induced to drive the 'bus to the

station. To that, "No, sir!" he said; "an old post-boy can't go to that. There be stations and callin's, and the station and callin' of a post-boy is one thing, and the station and callin' of a 'bus man is another. You can't pass from the one to the other."

He fell ill very suddenly and died almost before any one in the town—where he was well known—suspected that he was in danger.

But he had no doubt in his own mind that his sickness would end fatally, and he asked to see the landlady of the inn.

"Beg pardon, ma'am!" he said from his bed, touching his forelock, "very sorry I han't shaved for two days and you should see me thus. But please, ma'am, if it's no offence, be you wantin' that there yellow jacket any more? It seems to me post-boys is gone out altogether."

"No, George, I certainly do not want it."

"Nor these?—you'll understand me, ma'am, if I don't mention 'em."

"No, George; what can you require them for?"

"Nor that there old white beaver? I did my best, but it is a bit rubbed."

"I certainly do not need it."

"Thank y', ma'am, then I make so bold might I be buried in 'em as the last of the old postboys?"

AUNTIE



AUNTIE

NO one would suppose that Auntie had once been pretty. Yet Mrs. Estcourt, the Squire's wife, said that she was so at one time, and Mrs. Estcourt had known her from a girl and ought to be an authority.

No one without a moment's thought would suppose that she had once been young. Of course, when you considered, you knew that in the order of nature young she must have been; but her entire appearance and cut of figure and dress seemed to proclaim that she had been born old, and had remained at a standstill whilst the world moved on.

She was short, carried little curls like beer barrels arranged on each side of her forehead, had mild benevolent eyes of no particular colour, wore an old-fashioned bonnet, and gowns still older in fashion, for they were leg-of-mutton sleeved.

When tight sleeves came in, Auntie continued to wear her old-fashioned full sleeves. "My dear," she would say to one who objected that they were antiquated, "my dear, leg-o'-buttons will come in again."

Come in they have, but after Auntie had closed her eyes and could not see her prediction verified. Her skirts, flounced and full, saw the crinoline

come in and go out, saw the tight straight skirt, and saw fulness again become fashionable.

Auntie's gowns were mostly of dark grey, but she had one for the evening of good silk that was silver-grey, and in that, at night, Auntie looked quite presentable. But Auntie rarely wore it. She could not dine out, as she had no carriage or conveyance of any sort, and the risk of marring her one silk evening dress, by going on foot in such an unsettled climate as is ours in England to the house where the festive board was spread, that was too serious to be undertaken. But she did, once, dine in it at the Hall, without having been fetched. Then she had hired a farmer's butter-cart, that in which he sent some of the home produce to market. It was without springs, it was without seats, and it was *sans* steps. The cob that drew it was white and ungroomed, brought in for the occasion from the field in which it lay and rolled. Auntie's maid had put a chair in the cart and a chair beside the cart. By this means the old lady mounted into it, without the necessity of scrambling up the spokes of the wheel, or leaping on to the shaft, and thence somersaulting into the cart.

But this conveyance of two wheels so shook up Auntie internally that she had no appetite for her dinner, and no enjoyment of the social evening. Mrs. Estcourt, after that, sent the carriage for her, but Auntie could rarely be prevailed on to accept it. She was poor in pocket and large in heart, and she tipped the coachman on such occasions half-a-

crown, and half-a-crown to Auntie was a sum of money that she could ill afford to miss.

No one in the parish, rich or poor, secular or clerical, thought of calling the old lady by other name than "Auntie," yet was she aunt to no single person there, nor indeed remotely connected with any. Those who wished to be respectful called her Miss Jane, or Miss Auntie. Yet was there a tie, not of blood, that bound her to all and all to her, a tie even stronger than that of blood—the tie of infinite charity.

Never was there a woman with a kinder, more unselfish heart than old Auntie. Her mind was ever active, but occupied only with thought of others.

Unhappily we know by experience that this world of ours is full of selfishness, that among a hundred persons we meet, scarce one is not infected with this vice; nevertheless there is a salt of fresh unselfishness to be discovered. But among the many of these elect, the very crown and acme of all was, I verily believe, Auntie.

The parish knew her story, yet no one ventured on an allusion to it in her hearing, except possibly Mrs. Estcourt, who had been her schoolfellow, and with whom she did sometimes speak of the past, and open that old, but unwithered, heart.

The story was this.

When Auntie was young and pretty and little, for a little body she had ever been, she had been engaged to a handsome young fellow in the service of the East India Company. He had come to

England for a holiday, happened to see her, had been attracted by her, as well, perhaps, as by the fact that she had some money of her own, and he proposed to her to accept him and go out with him to India.

She certainly was greatly attached to Mr. Warnacre. She had never cared for any man previously, never had gone into a gentle flirtation even.

Her younger sister was at school, finishing her education, but when the day of the marriage was fixed, she was brought home that she might serve as bridesmaid to her sister.

Emily—this schoolgirl—was far prettier than Jane who was to be married, and what money there was, left by the mother, went equally in shares to each sister.

The cares of trousseau weighed heavily on Miss Jane, and were undertaken with that thoroughness that characterised all she did. So occupied was she over the preliminaries, so necessarily occupied was she, as her mother was dead and she had no elder sister, that she could not be as much as she wished with her intended, and was constrained to leave him to walk and talk and lounge about with Emily.

On the day before the marriage, bridegroom and sister had disappeared. They had eloped together and were married before it was discovered whither they had gone.

The blow was acutely felt, how acutely no one knew. Mrs. Estcourt, who was not Mrs. Estcourt

then, hastened to her friend to show sympathy and love.

"My dear," said Jane, with her eyes full, "it was only natural. I ought not to have thought of keeping him. Emily is so beautiful. He naturally only cared for me till he saw her. I hope, please God, they will be happy together."

Mr. Warnacre did not venture back to the village, but carried off his wife at once to India.

After a while Auntie's friend became Mrs. Estcourt, and then this latter lady insisted on Jane taking a cottage on her husband's estate, so as to be near her. She desired to befriend her, and befriend her she did. But the condition of life of a great country squire's wife, the wife of a man who aimed at becoming representative of his county in Parliament, and that of a solitary lady with moderate means, in a cottage, and without connections in the place, were so diverse, that much as Mrs. Estcourt desired to see a great deal of her friend, she was not able to do so.

As time went on, and the Squire was elected, and a large part of Mrs. Estcourt's life was spent in town, the opportunities for social intercourse with Auntie became less, and when the family was at the Hall there were so many visitors, friends made in London, and political allies and acquaintances, who crowded the house, who were there to dine, and dance, and shoot, and attend political meetings, that even whilst in the country, Mrs. Estcourt could not see much of her old school

friend. Moreover, when Jane did dine at the Hall, it was with persons whom she did not understand, who belonged to another order of existence to herself, persons with whom she had no common topics of conversation, consequently she declined invitations and remained at home.

As yet she had not acquired the title of Auntie; that accrued to her in this way.

Before many years had elapsed Mrs. Warnacre sent home her only child, a little boy, to be brought up in England, as the Indian climate is fatal to growing European children. And to whom else could she confide her treasure but to Jane? She must have been an easy-going, shallow creature, this Emily, unable to understand the wrong she had done to her sister, and without an expression of regret, without a word of apology, sent her the child; and easy-going, unscrupulous must Warnacre have been, for he sent remittances for his son's clothing and education but rarely, so that the cost of the maintenance of the child fell on Jane. Then Emily died of cholera, and after that no more money was sent, no inquiries were made; she found herself burdened with this nephew—and then it was that the title of Auntie attached itself to her never to be lost.

Young John Warnacre grew up under Auntie's eye, and at her charge. She was obliged then to deprive herself of many little comforts and pleasures. Hitherto she had kept a pony-chaise, and a useful man who attended to her cob and the garden.

Now she did without, abandoned the drives that once afforded her so much pleasure and had given such a healthy glow to her cheek, and reduced her garden to a couple of flower-beds that could be attended to by an occasional man.

As young John Warnacre grew up, he proved wayward, headstrong, and selfish. She yielded to him too much, but it was in her nature to yield. She had neither the moral nor physical strength to control a turbulent, self-willed boy.

When he was too old and too ungovernable for her, he was sent to school, and schooling, if good, is costly. Auntie was too conscientious not to send the boy to a school for gentlemen, and one that was expensive, and might therefore be supposed to furnish a thorough education.

So matters rubbed on. In his holidays John was with his aunt, tormenting her cat and dog, running over her flowers, breaking her windows, making for his aunt boobie-traps and apple-pie beds; in a word, leading her such a life that she sighed for the holidays to come to an end, but was too tender at heart to admit, even to herself, that she wished them over.

At last the Squire was obliged to complain. John had been laying snares in his preserves, and was getting into association with some of the worst characters in the place. After a struggle he was sent back to school for the rest of the holiday, but he never arrived at the tutor's: he ran away, and was heard of no more. Many tears did Auntie shed

over the prodigal, and bitterly did she reproach herself for having been so severe as to send him away.

It was ascertained at last that he had gone to sea, with the intention, if possible, of getting to India to his father.

But, if he ever got to India, he did not find Mr. Warnacre there, for this gentleman arrived at Auntie's and quartered himself upon her. He had left the service of John Company, as he saw no prospect of advancement, and he believed he could better himself elsewhere, with his capacity for business, his knowledge of the world, and his faculty of speaking several languages.

Auntie was pleased rather than the contrary that Mr. Warnacre should come to her. It showed that he had forgotten the past and bore her no grudge. Alas! poor humble soul, it did not occur to her that it was *she* who should resent his conduct, not he hers, and that his throwing himself upon her showed singular moral insensibility.

He was very desirous that his sister-in-law should see the Squire, who as M.P. might be able to use influence to obtain him a post under Government.

Auntie was shy of asking a favour. Shy and retreating, she would have asked nothing for herself, but for another she would do a great deal. After a battle with her timidity, she did go to the Hall, and had an interview with Mr. Estcourt, who valued and admired the dear old lady, and he readily promised to see what could be done for Mr. Warnacre. All he desired were the testimonials of that gentleman.

But here precisely arose a difficulty. He could not produce them, and when inquiry was made into his antecedents, it was discovered that Mr. Warnacre had been dismissed from the service of the Company. This, Mr. Estcourt did not tell Auntie, but with many apologies expressed his regret at being unable to serve her.

Somehow—it is hard to say how—the rumour circulated that Auntie was about to sell out of the stocks so as to set up Mr. Warnacre in some business he had in view, in which great profits were certain to be made.

The rumour came to the ears of Mrs. Estcourt, and without ado that good, somewhat peremptory lady called on Auntie, and happily found her alone.

The Squire's wife proceeded at once to attack the old lady on the topic. Was it true that she was about to place her little fortune in the hands of this brother-in-law? For if Jane meditated doing this, Mrs. Estcourt said it would be her painful duty to inform Auntie of certain matters concerning Mr. Warnacre that in kindness had been kept from her.

Auntie coloured and trembled, and raised her bemitten hands in deprecation of the interference and the revelation. Then she began to explain :

“Mr. Warnacre really was a surprisingly clever man. He had met with misfortunes, he had made enemies, who had not scrupled to blacken his character. It was too sad to see a man of his ability and acquirements without an opening in which to display his activity.”

"But, my dear Jane, he has been dishonest!"

"O Maria, we are all guilty of doing wrong sometimes, and I am sure we ought not to be hard on those who have. Even supposing he has made a mistake, we ought to give him the helping hand, and put him in a position where he can make amends."

"My dear Jane," said Mrs. Estcourt, and she set her lips. "Excuse me if I speak unpleasant truths. How do you know, how does Mr. Warnacre know, that what he proposes to undertake will be successful? There is many a slip between the cup and the lip. With the very best and most honourable intentions, he may miscarry. Then what will become of you?"

"Oh, my dear Maria, he is certain to succeed. He has shown it me so very plainly."

"He may not. Always be prepared for a *not*."

"But for his sake I must risk something. He was my dear Emily's husband, remember that. And he has had such trials and troubles—he has lost her, and does not know where poor John is."

"Jane, it won't do. Excuse my bluntness. Suppose the whole thing fails. Where would you be? If your little income is gone, then you will be penniless in your old age. Now that means—" Mrs. Estcourt moved uncomfortably in her chair. She was going to say a harsh thing, but did it only because she believed that nothing else could save Auntie. "That means, Jane, that you will come upon me. I will not see you turned out of your cottage to starve. When all your income is gone,

I shall have to furnish you with an annuity. Now, mind, I should not object to that, if the result of an accident, a bad investment, or failure of a bank. But that you should deliberately and with your eyes open throw this upon me is not fair; no, it is not fair to me."

Poor little Auntie crimsoned to her temples. She tried to speak, but could not. Then she broke down, covered her face with her kerchief and wept. Mrs. Estcourt held to her point.

"I have promised it him," sobbed Auntie.

"You may, if you will, give him something. But I insist—I insist for my own sake as well as for yours—that you do not give him all. Reserve to yourself so much as you can live on. Say, keep as much as was expended on yourself when you were sending that boy to school. That alone will satisfy me."

At length Mrs. Estcourt carried her point. She extorted a solemn reluctant promise to that effect from the old lady, and that she would not go beyond her word Mrs. Estcourt knew very surely.

And well was it for the little Auntie that this interview had taken place, for within a twelvemonth all she had given to Mr. Warnacre was gone, and gone without return of interest or principal. With it also Mr. Warnacre had disappeared. Then she lived on, in the same house, on her shrunken means, doing good to all around—knitting crossovers for old women, making mittens for children, warm woollen caps and mufflers that she sent to the engine-drivers on the line to keep them comfortable

on a winter's night, busy before Christmas in contriving presents for all around, forgetful of no birthday, visiting and sitting with the sick and aged, and although her gifts were never costly, yet they were always valued highly by the recipients, for the love and kindly thought that was worked into them. She manufactured little book-markers, with crosses on them, of perforated card ; she did embroidery for the church ; she painted little pin-cushions, and her flower-painting was tasteful. These she was glad to sell, and Mrs Estcourt came to her assistance and disposed of an astonishing number at sixpence each. They were so useful for gentlemen, would go into a breast pocket, and gentlemen were always wanting pins. But Auntie would use none of the money thus acquired upon herself; it was spent in the purchase of material for making her little gifts to the poor, or for the church.

The parson had his daily service, but the most constant of his congregation, certainly in the mornings, was Auntie, who never failed.

Mrs. Estcourt brought visitors from the Hall to see her, not such as were unable to appreciate the goodness and sweetness of the old lady, but kindly-hearted ladies and gentlemen, and somehow these visitors afterwards in town, or wherever else they met the Squire, always inquired after Auntie. They felt they were the better for having seen and spoken with her.

To some it was a revelation that there were, in this self-seeking and somewhat coarse world, some

highly-refined, unselfish spirits, the violets of the moral world.

As already said, every one in the place knew her story, but to her face no one alluded to it. Among the English peasantry there is a wonderful and beautiful delicacy of feeling such as often puts to shame those who belong to highly-cultured grades. The utmost done was to ask, "Please, miss, have you heard anything of Master John?"

Then a quiver would pass over the old face, the lip would tremble, and the eye fall, and she would shake her head, unable to give the denial in words.

Often and often did Mrs. Estcourt send to her grapes or peaches or melons from the conservatories at the Hall, and yet she knew that most of these good things were at once distributed by the old lady among the children as they swarmed out of school, or given to some sick body with a capricious appetite.

The farmers also or their wives sent her poultry, the children picked for her watercress, the poor women gave her eggs, and then Auntie had no rest until she had proclaimed to the parson and his wife, to the squiress, to all she knew, how good and generous these poor bodies had been to her.

And every day she sat at her window painting her pin-cushions or making the little crosses for book-markers, or setting them up on little card stands, or illuminating texts, and nodding and smiling to all passers-by in the road, and to the children as they came to school. Between school

hours in wet weather many a little girl found a refuge in Auntie's kitchen, there to eat her dinner and have warm milk or tea.

It was a sad prospect to Auntie when her sight began to fail. Resigned to the will of Heaven she ever was, but she regretted the inability into which she would fall of manufacturing comforting articles for the poor.

So years passed.

Nothing was heard of Warnacre, nothing of John. No word of reproach passed her lips. I believe no resentful thought arose in her mind against her brother-in-law, and I am sure that both he and John were daily mentioned in her prayers.

Then, one stormy evening, a knock came at the door, and she heard some one coughing without. The little maid opened, and a wretched, wet, and draggled man staggered in. It was Warnacre, returned, but returned destitute, a wreck in health, and a beggar.

The little maid who had gone to the door at the rap was frightened, and thought that the man was drunk - she had never seen Mr. Warnacre, and her exclamations of distress and alarm brought the old lady to the passage.

Warnacre had thrown himself into a chair, the rain had sodden his battered hat, and his shapeless and napless greatcoat, and ran over the floor. The man was grey in face, his scanty hair dishevelled, and his eyes dull and sunk in his head.

A fit of coughing prevented him from speaking.

"Oh, please, miss, what shall we do? It's a tipsy, it is. Shall I run for the police?"

"No, Kate, no, the gentleman is ill." Auntie had not as yet recognised him, but she brought the light near, and with an exclamation of pain and surprise cried, "O William! William! you here again?"

"What," said he, "are you like the rest, ready to turn against me? It is a bad and selfish world; no one has a hand to hold out for a fellow who is down on his luck. I've walked——"

Again the cough overtook him, and he put a soiled handkerchief to his mouth.

"I have walked, I suppose, fourteen miles in this cursed weather—haven't had anything to eat. I'd turn out my pockets and prove to you I have not a stiver, but my hands are too cold, and my clothes cling to me with wet."

"O William! how have you come to this?"

"Ill-health—breakdown—overmuch brain-work. And the world is dishonest; cursed cheats men are. It is no place for a man of genius and integrity."

"But what will you do?"

He coughed again, and sank back, looking deadly in his exhaustion.

"It is a shame, my troubling you with questions. Kate, Kate, get hot water, and bread and meat, and a tumbler, and I will unlock my cellaret."

Then, as the little maid bustled about fulfilling commands: "O William! I am so sorry, and why, why did you walk so far?"

"Because I wasn't going to the workhouse.

No, thank you, *I* am a gentleman. I thought you would give me food and a shake-down."

"O William, how good of you to think of me. Oh, this is kind, and like a brother-in-law. Of course you could not go to the Union. I would have died of shame to think that you had, and of self-reproach to think you had not come on to me. But you forgive all that is past. That is dear of you, William."

She took him in ; of course she did.

She opened to him her heart as well as her home. And there he remained. He made no movement to leave. Perhaps he perceived that nowhere else would he be so kindly and forgivingly dealt with. Not one word of reproach came from her.

Then it became clear that his stay would not be for long, not that he desired and purposed leaving, but that a hand was pointing sternly to him to move on, to move on from a world in which he had done no worthy act, into another in which he would have to account for his worthlessness.

Auntie fought against the conviction that he was dying. She sent for the best doctors, she provided the most nourishing diet she could procure for him. Her great sorrow was that her means would not allow her to send him to Davos or to some other place of cure.

Warnacre was not a pleasant person to have in the house and as a patient. He grumbled at the wine provided—it came from the grocer, he said; it was without bouquet, mere made-up stuff. He

grumbled at his meat, it was tough and overdone or underdone. He bragged about the great people with whom he had dined, whom he had known familiarly; or he whined over the ingratitude and heartlessness of the world, or murmured against that Providence which had thwarted him in all he had taken in hand.

Yet, through all, patiently, lovingly, cheerfully, the old maid ministered to him, bore with his meanness, turned aside his sarcasms, apologised for his ungraciousness when visited by any from the Hall or rectory.

She treasured up every imaginary sign of returning health and shut her eyes to the tokens of decline. At length he was dead, and was laid in the churchyard, unlamented save by Auntie.

Of his son he professed to know nothing. He had not run across him in his meanders through the shady world in which he had moved. But in the heart of Auntie there was still a root of love and expectation that concerned John.

Above Mr. Warnacre's grave, Auntie, by stinting herself, was able to erect a costly monumental stone, on which was represented a broken lily, the symbol of Warnacre's stainless life. The inscription recorded his merits in somewhat fulsome terms that were, however, not unreal and untrue to Auntie, or she would not have sanctioned them, for over that wretched creature still hung some of the halo of her first love and idealisation.

And after that her sight failed, and happily not

long after that, gently, without pain, old Auntie's eyes closed altogether.

But then Mrs. Estcourt was gone. Her husband had predeceased her, and at the Hall reigned a nephew, a man of sport, who knew not Auntie.

A year later there appeared a stranger in the place, who after some inquiries went to the church-yard and asked the sexton to point out to him where Auntie was buried. There was no head-stone, only a green mound. But there were flowers strewn on it; the poor whom she had loved and to whom she had ministered had not forgotten her.

The stranger signed to the sexton to leave him. Then he stood, with folded hands and bowed head, looking at the little heap. He was a young man, but with a seamed face. Presently the tears came into his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. "Poor, dear Auntie," he said in a whisper, "imposed on, ill-treated—only appreciated by me—and that too late."

He drew out of his pocket a little cross made of perforated cardboard. It had been given years before to young John.

Then he went to a monumental stone-cutter and said: "Make me a marble cross, just like this."

"And, sir, what shall I cut on it?"

"Only this—AUNTIE."

BROTHER AUGUSTINE

*



BROTHER AUGUSTINE

IN 1866 I was appointed to the perpetual curacy of Dalton, near Thirsk in Yorkshire. It was a new parish, cut out of Topcliffe; the church was not built at the time, but an old barn had been converted into a school-chapel, and a little red brick house had been erected, intended eventually to be a schoolmaster's house, which I was given as parsonage. It was small—containing one sitting-room only, and three bedrooms upstairs. When I went to see the place, the outgoing incumbent said to me, "Would you like to take on Mills?"

"Mills! Who is Mills?"

"I mean Brother Augustine."

"Brother Augustine!" I echoed; "and who the dickens is Brother Augustine?"

"Well," replied my friend, "that is not so easy to answer. What he is now is my valet and sacristan. He is a man who can make your clothes, mend anything, wait on you, and be most serviceable in church."

"What! that fellow who sang in the choir through his nose as though there had been a vibrating metallic tongue in it?"

"The same: very useful, but odd."

"Where did you pick him up?"

"I advertised for him."

I took on Brother Augustine or Mr. Mills. Some called him one, some the other, and rightly, for he had two aspects, very distinct.

When I engaged him he was aged, I suppose, thirty-five, but it was impossible to say what his age really was: he was one of those men who look old when twenty, and never alter. He did not tell me his age. He was as coy as an old maid about that, but he was very ready to tell me his story, and it was an odd one.

He had been given when quite a little boy by his father, in Colchester, to the Roman Catholic priest there, who brought him up, and made him serve him daily at the altar, black his boots, and help the old housekeeper to make the beds, and dust the rooms, and clean the dishes. He also brought in the meals.

This went on till, as Mr. Mills said to me, "the dear old priest got so very old that he was fit for nothing but to be chaplain to a convent, so he was moved away, and then I had to be put somewhere. So I was put with Hyams, the tailor."

How long Mills was with Hyams I do not know, but the swirl of life in freedom after the even and quiet of a parsonage was more than he could bear, and he took it into his head to become a monk.

He entered on his novitiate, "And," said he, "they shaved my head, and I have been a martyr to neuralgia ever since."

After a while he was sent to Rome. I cannot now recall what the Order was into which he had entered.

"I got into trouble there," said Brother Augustine. "You must know that I am passionately fond of cats, and I had not had a cat to pat and coax ever since I had become a monk. Well, one day we were walking in procession down the long street in Trastevere, when I saw a white cat, with one paw black and one ear black, sitting in a doorway of a house. I could not help myself. The sight of that puss was too much for my pent-up feelings—there was a sort of void in me that only a cat could fill. Well, I broke out of the procession and ran to the cat to catch it up. But it was frightened, and made a bolt and was gone. That set all the monks off laughing to see me after the cat. We had been singing a psalm, and they could not get on with it. I was put on bread and water for a week, all because of that cat."

Brother Augustine was not happy in Rome, and was teased with neuralgia. After a twelvemonth he was sent back to England, and he had made up his mind not to take the vows. So on landing at London he gave the slip to the monk who was sent along with him, and found his way into some sort of refuge for runaway monks and nuns that had been set up, just as there are refuges for stray cats and dogs.

There he made acquaintance with Miss Headly Vicars, who was most kind to him, and of her he

spoke with deep regard. By her advice he became a Scripture reader, or if not by her advice, with her consent.

He remained for some little while drawing a salary and doing some off-and-on work, very much against his taste, as Scripture reader, for it was a position for which he was totally unqualified. At last he became uneasy in his conscience, he felt he was earning money he did not deserve, and the work was uncongenial. Then he saw an advertisement from my predecessor at Dalton for a young man to act as man-servant, sing in the choir—("Bray, rather," said I to myself)—and attend to the church.

This was exactly what he wanted. He answered, was accepted; and I found him at Dalton, and kept him on.

I have said that Mr. Mills, or Brother Augustine, wore two different aspects.

Usually, about the house and at church he wore a cassock, and a little black square cap set on the back of his head.

When not engaged about the church, he was generally to be seen seated cross-legged on the kitchen table, making a suit for me, or mending or making clothes for himself.

But, when Mr. Mills was dressed to go to Thirsk, the market town, he was as though he had walked out of a bandbox—dapper, spick and span in everything; a masher one would call him now, but in 1866 the word was not invented.

A most disinterested fellow he was. I did not pay him any wage. He had his food and room with me, and nothing else. If he wanted to go to York or Ripon, I gave him his fare, and a shilling to spend as he liked. He never had more whilst with me for two years. His mind was like that of a child. He was happy over the merest trifles, and upset also by trifles. A good-hearted fellow with a limited education, very fond of puss, and devotedly attached to animals. Every one laughed at him, but every one liked him. He would do anything that I asked him to do, and go anywhere.

I had an old housekeeper, a worthy woman who was a widow, and she and Mills were always laughing, and, when not laughing, he was singing. The kitchen was immediately opposite my one sitting-room, and as the door was generally open, they made a good deal of noise, to which I had to become accustomed.

One morning Mr. Mills appeared in lavender small-clothes, a black frock coat, white waistcoat, straw-coloured kid gloves, and a silk hat that shone as if it had been oiled. In his button-hole he wore a stephanotis. His face was twinkling with smiles.

He appeared before me flourishing a Malacca cane.

"Why—Brother Augustine! what are you about?" I exclaimed.

"I have walked through the village," he replied, "and I want to go into Thirsk."

"What for?"

"Only to get a rise out of the Daltonians. You

should have seen the round eyes they made as I walked past their houses. And I have just been into the school to show myself to the mistress and the children. I really am curious to know to whom they will have married me—for they will all jump to the conclusion that I have gone into Thirsk to be married."

My predecessor had been accustomed to have the chorister boys go to the parsonage after the Litany, which was sung in the afternoon, and have tea there, and hang about the garden till evensong at half-past six. I found this a burden more than I could bear, and I announced that I was regretfully obliged to discontinue the usage.

After having made the announcement, I was breathing free, when Mills came to me with a blank face.

"They have struck," he said.

"Struck what?—struck you?" I asked.

"They will not put on their cassocks and surplices and go into the choir this evening."

"Well, Mr. Mills, then we will manage without them."

So we did. One, faithful among the faithless found, did put on his surplice. A little fellow who could not read. However, we sang the whole service, psalms, responses, *Magnificat*, *Nunc Dimittis*, hymns, just as though we had a full choir. I do not think there was any musician in the congregation that evening, for I do not recall any one being carried out fainting.

There was one peculiarity about Mills that I could not break him of. He had learned the Apostles' Creed in the Roman version, which differed slightly from our form, and he would always bray forth that "form of sound words" which he had acquired in his childhood.

In 1868 there was about to be a change in my domestic arrangements—in fact, I was about to be married—consequently I was forced, much to my regret, to get rid of Mills.

After a little inquiry and some letter-writing, it was settled that he should go to Christ Church and become valet to Dr. Pusey, at that time getting old and infirm.

In the event of sickness, I knew that no one could be a more tender and devoted nurse than Brother Augustine. There was something feminine in his delicacy of touch and in his sweetness of manner. And he would give up his time in the most unselfish manner possible to the doctor. Of that I was quite confident.

So Brother Augustine departed, with tears in his eyes, and there was not a person in the parish who was not sorry to lose him. For although they had laughed at him, all appreciated his goodness and his kindness; and I am not sure but that what they laughed at most was his absolute guilelessness, his utter unworldliness, and that, to a Yorkshireman, is indeed astonishing. I heard next of him as installed at Christ Church, where he figured in the quad in just the same extraordinary costume

as he had worn with me; and his funny ways, his old-fashioned politeness, and his simplicity vastly tickled the young students. I believe sundry tricks were played on him, but I never heard any particulars.

That he was very happy I did learn from himself.

He was given a room near Dr. Pusey's quarters in Christ Church, that adjoined or was under another in which one of the men of the college was lodged.

Now, Brother Augustine had the way of singing the psalms in his discordant bray every night, and one evening the young fellow who was near him, unable to endure the noise, went to his door, knocked, and Brother Augustine appeared at his door half-undressed for bed. The Christ Church man complained—really he could not work—he was going in for his examination, and with that singing—he—he was distracted.

"I beg your pardon humbly! I really am most sorry," said the poor brother, covered with confusion. "I had no idea—certainly, certainly—you shall not be troubled again."

So with a bow he saw his visitor depart, shut his door, and with his psalm unfinished went to bed.

He was found next morning dead. He had died apparently painlessly—of heart complaint—gone off in his sleep, to finish his psalm where his voice would give no offence.

HAROUN THE CARPENTER

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HAROUN THE CARPENTER

HAROUN, *bien entendu*, was not his name, but it was that by which some called him among themselves. The reason will appear in the sequel. He lived in a low house of one storey, with a door in the middle, and a window on each side, a typical Welsh cottage, with a thatched roof, and the roof drawn down over the gables, also in a peculiarly Welsh style.

He had his yard and workshop behind the house. In front was a bit of garden, of which he took great care, and which was bright with flowers from earliest spring to latest fall.

"Aaron," the squire's wife would say, "how *do* you manage to get your bulbs to bloom before mine?"

"My lady," he would reply, "I hold they like the smell of the wood."

Aaron was, in fact, his Christian name. The reason why, in the rectory and in the Hall, he was called Haroun was this:—

Aaron was a man of one book, and that book was the "Arabian Nights."

Many years ago a copy was given to the lending library of the village, and was taken out by Aaron

Price, the carpenter. He had not read three pages before his mind was in the grip of the narrator. He read, he did not sleep, he did not work, or worked badly, he went to church, but did not pray —his mind had been carried up and away from the present, away from the green Welsh valley in which he lived, away, over the russet mountains to the gorgeous East, and to the times when Jinns were all-powerful unless controlled by Solomon's seal, and magicians were as common as blackberries and as mischievous as kittens.

Aaron very nearly fell into disrepute as a carpenter on account of that book, so badly was his work done when under the spell. But he rallied. He became active, industrious, skilful once more, yet never, thenceforth, was the witchery of the "Arabian Nights" off his mind. He had no rest to his soul till he had purchased a copy for himself, and from that precious volume he read daily. He never wearied of it ; he never wanted another book.

"Lord, sir, it is meat and drink to me!" he said once when questioned about it. He was advised to give it up. "I couldn't do it," was his reply. "Beside—what would be the good? It's in me, all over me, in every fibre. I know it from one cover to the other."

"Then why not part with it—if so familiar?"

"Why don't you part with your wife because you know her face and voice and thoughts? I couldn't do it. I love the book because so familiar to me—every tale, every word."

One day a note from the Hall told the rector that the squiress had got a real treat for Haroun. She was going to give him as a Christmas present "Tales of the Genii."

The rector laid down his daily paper, took his hat and stick, and pushed down to the Hall at once.

"My dear lady! I implore you, do nothing of the kind. Give him a book on practical carpentering or a dictionary of gardening. But another book of Jinns and necromancers will turn poor Haroun mad altogether."

Now and then, on a Sunday evening, the rector would say to his wife, "Look here, Rosie, I could read Haroun's mind to-day as he sat under the pulpit, as though it were a book in large primer type, open before me. He was very attentive when I began my sermon, and he followed me some way, but by degrees his eye became vacant, abstracted, his expression of face altered, and I knew that he was away with the Three Calenders, hearing why Zobeide whipped the hounds."

"Harry," responded the rectoress, "you have only yourself to blame. Try to be more interesting when you preach."

"My dear Rosie," exclaimed the parson, "I do my level best, but what pulpit discourse could ever compete with 'Sindbad's Voyages' or 'The Hunchback'?"

The good lady sighed and said, "Whatever will Haroun do for a wife? We have no Fatimas and Zobeides in this village."

"I wish with all my heart that Haroun would weave his own web of romance, fall in love, and—then he'd forget the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"In time this infatuation will wear off."

"I doubt it. This has now been going on for years, and that book only works its way deeper into his soul. Upon my word, Rosie, I believe the Bible interests him only because of the wonders that are in it."

"Then, my dear, I am sure you judge him wrong. He is a good man, and God-fearing."

"Yes—but oh! so fantastical."

Aaron Price did not keep his treasury of stories bottled up in his own breast. He was great at retailing them, but he transferred the scenery to Wales, translated Camaralzaman and Badoura into David Jones and Sheena Williams, located every incident in some well-known spot, and thoroughly bewildered his hearers, who could not make out whether he were poking fun at them or narrating facts.

Perhaps the climax was reached when he converted Ganem the slave of Love, into the amiable, somewhat corpulent, and eminently respectable squire, Sir John Vaughan, at Llanselyf. The whole tale was told with so much circumstance and such actuality, that next Sunday, when the squire came to church, he found himself the object of intense interest, observation, and private whispered comment.

It may be remembered that in the original tale

Ganem was up a tree overhanging a cemetery when he saw some slaves bury a chest, at the dead of night, in the earth. When they were gone he descended from the tree, dug down to and opened the chest, when he found it contained a lady of incomparable beauty who "as soon as she was released from her confined situation, and exposed to the open air began to sneeze, and half-opening her eyes and rubbing them exclaimed, 'Zohorob Bostan (Flower of the Garden), Schagrom Marglan (Branch of Coral), Cassabos Souccar (Sugar-cane), Nouronnihar (Light of Day), Nagmatos Sohi (Star of the Morning), Nouzhetos Zaman (Delight of the Season), speak, where are you ?'"

This, as related by the carpenter, took a very local and personal complexion. The incident was transferred to the churchyard of his own parish, and to a certain elm tree that grew there ; it was Sir John Vaughan who climbed the tree, and the lady when released from the box exclaimed, " Mary Jones, my housemaid, Flower of the Garden, and you, Susanna Rees, scullery-maid, Branch of Coral ; and you also, Elizabeth Thomas, tweenie maid and Sugar-cane ; and you, Margaret Cole, the lady's-maid, Light of Day, and under housemaid Joan, Star of the Morning, and third housemaid Wilmot, Delight of the Season, speak, my dear tried servants, where are you ?"

Now, on this particular Sunday morning, not only was Sir John an object of great interest, but so

was Lady Vaughan, and when, during the service, she sneezed, it produced a general agitation; so also were the maid-servants of the family. On their arrival there were nudgings, "Here comes Branch of Coral, and there is Light of the Day. But where is Flower of the Garden?" To which an answer came in a whisper, "Got a bad cold in her head, and can't come to church."

Now, a remarkable occurrence in the parish took place. Aaron, *alias* Haroun, fell in love, and ~~took~~ to courting Elizabeth Thomas, *alias* Sugar-cane, *alias* Cassabos Souccar, the tweenie maid. It took the whole parish by surprise, for Elizabeth was not beautiful; she had not the eyes or the frame, or the *svelte* movements or the elastic tread of the light gazelle. She was a somewhat heavily formed, broad-shouldered, pudding-faced damsels, who could not cross a room without rattling all the chimney ornaments, and who had no more imagination and genius than has a duck. And in what did the attraction consist? Why had Aaron not become enamoured of the lady's-maid, a most willowy person with a very sweet and refined face? Why not with the kitchen-maid, the Sprig of Coral, who had indeed coralline lips, and who in time would know how to boil a potato and do a chop so as not to be done to leather. But a tweenie! and such a tweenie! The whole parish discussed it for a month. It was most astounding that the man who romanced about every one and everything and every place, should make such dead prose of his

own love affair. However, after this had been debated in the servants' hall, at the forge, in the stable, at the tavern, each such debate ended with some one remarking sententiously, "After all, it is his affair and not mine."

It is, however, a mistake to say that Aaron's courtship was prosaic. That it was not so was proved by one of his letters to Elizabeth Thomas, which the girl carelessly left about; and it got read, copied, and distributed through the village, and excited much admiration at the splendour of the style, till some one detected the original, of which it was but a copy, in the story of Abdul Hassan and Schemselnihar. Here is the epistle—

"AARON PRICE, *carpenter*, to ELIZABETH THOMAS, *tweenie maid*.

"Deprived of your presence, I seek to continue the illusion, and converse with you by means of these ill-formed lines, which afford me some pleasure, while I am prevented the happiness of speaking to you.

"Patience, they say, is the remedy of all evils; yet those I suffer are increased instead of relieved by it. Although your image is indelibly engraven on my heart, my eyes nevertheless wish again to behold the original.

"These sentiments, which my fingers trace, and in expressing which I feel such inconceivable pleasure that I cannot repeat them too often,

proceed from the bottom of my heart, from that incurable wound you have made in it; a wound which I bless a thousand times, notwithstanding the cruel sufferings I endure in your absence.

"Do not imagine that my words convey more than I feel. Alas! whatever expressions I may use, I shall still think much more than I can ever say. My eyes, which never cease looking for you, and incessantly weep till they shall behold you again; my afflicted heart, which seeks but you; my sighs, which escape my lips whenever I think on you, and that is continually; my imagination which never reflects any object but my beloved prince tweenie-maid; the complaints I offer to heaven of the rigour of my fate; in short, my melancholy, my uneasiness, my sufferings, from which I have had no respite since I lost sight of you, are all-sufficient pledges of the truth of what I write. I pray that we may be granted an opportunity of telling each other, without restraint, the tender affection we feel, and that we will never cease to love. Farewell.

"I salute Lady Vaughan, to whom we each have so many obligations."

Not to make too long a story of this. The course of true love ran smoothly enough. The adored tweenie took it all very calmly, very much as a matter of course, and in due time they were married.

No one supposed that they could be happy

together, so opposite were they to each other. Yet never did the parish see a more affectionate and devoted couple. Aaron "yarned" to his Bessie, telling her his marvellous tales. She knitted or darned listening with a stolid face, and when he had done said, "Aaron, get along with your nonsense, I don't believe in any of your marvels."

He took her disbelief in good part. If she did not relish his tales, it was her misfortune and not her fault. He was soul, she was body, and each has its proper place in the economy of nature. He was everything that was imaginative, she was wholly commonplace, and the mixture in one household produced not ferment, but peace.

"I wish," said Aaron, "I wish, Lizzie, I could see wonders. I read of them, I think of them, I tell of them, and yet I have never seen one."

Suddenly, to the amazement of every one, Aaron died. He caught a chill that settled on his lungs, and he was dead in three days. His wife attended to him with devotion and unflagging solicitude. One night he turned his bright feverish eyes on her and said—

"Liz! kiss me. I'm going at last to see wonders, and you won't say to me there, where I am going: 'Get along with your nonsense.'"

He did not say another word, but passed in this eager, expectant attitude of soul into the World of Wonders.

Every one respected Haroun, though he had perplexed all, and all had laughed at him. His

death was felt by all, and the entire parish attended his funeral. Sir John Vaughan forgave having been converted into Ganem, the slave of Love, and he was there.

And when Aaron was gone, all said—

"We can't, for certain, have a more pleasant and romancing carpenter in his place, even if we get—which is doubtful—a better workman."

And now I come to another singular fact, and fact it is. The widow, Bessie Price, that dull, inanimate, prosaic body—soul none thought to call her—moped and drooped after his death. Nothing roused her, nothing interested her, she seemed to have lost everything when the earth closed over the dear, rodomontading carpenter. Folk said at first, "Bless you, she's not one to feel her loss. She has not the depth in her."

But they were mistaken. She felt her loss so deeply, so intensely, that without any apparent malady, she drooped, faded, and from no perceptible physical cause sank, and within twelve months, this bit of putty or dough was laid by the quicksilver of her husband.

And so, even in this dull, heavy creature there was the poetry of love, the romance of a life devoted to one man. Where Love is—there is the Spirit of Poesy.

SHONE EVANS



SHONE EVANS

SHONE, that is to say John, Evans was a miner in the Dulais Valley, in South Wales, and a man nearer forty than thirty.

The Dulais Valley had been solitary, with a brawling mountain stream flowing between great ridges of brown heathery moss-land, on which the sheep had browsed and shone white in the sun. But of late years there had come a transformation of the scene. Coalpits had been opened. Plain, ugly rows of houses had been run up. Tall chimneys had been erected, chapels and churches, public-houses, factories as well. What sheep still fed on the hilltops were grey, if not black, for the air was heavy with smoke, and the soot settled everywhere, and not the sweetest herb could avoid a flavour of soot, nor the fairest flower escape a film of "smuts."

As for the sparkling, laughing Dulais, it had turned to a sullen, dirty stream, of which nothing was required but that it should carry off the scum and sewage of the dense population that clogged the valley and dug into the hills. In long-gone-by days the stream had acquired its name of Black-water, for so Dulais may be interpreted, from the

lyns and pools of bottle-green deeps, formed after its leaps over the barriers of rocks. Now it merited its name more truly, so sombre was it, in the midst of heaps of coal refuse, and so soiled were its waters with every sort of defilement.

"Man makes the town, God made the country," is a saying; but it is only half true. God makes the town, for He it is who has laid the beds of coal, and run into the rock the veins of ore that draw men to excavate them, and without which men would hunger, and civilisation could not progress.

Beautiful on the hills of old were the harebells, beautiful in the evening the glory of light that lit up the russet hills—ugly, maybe, is now the mining settlement; and yet there is a loveliness above that of harebell and bracken and heather and foaming mountain rill in the lives of the men and women who have invaded and displaced the rude natural charms of the Dulais Valley. And I am going to tell you of one of these beauties, and thus I introduce you to Shone Evans.

The man himself was not comely. A broad-shouldered, plain man, with a stoop such as is often seen in colliers—a reserved, a serious man, and somewhat shy. Perhaps in this he was a typical Welshman—that he was full of tenderness of heart and deep feeling, but at the least token of ridicule or superciliousness, he closed like a flower against rain, brooded over any injury his feelings may have received, but he said nothing.

Centuries of isolation and of wrong done to the

Welsh race have had this effect on them. They have been sneered at, swaggered over by domineering Saxons or tyrannical Normans, then exploited by speculative North-countrymen; they have been treated as men to be employed for the advantage of others, and when useless, to be cast aside as broken tools. Their idiosyncrasies have been the subject of joke and scoff; their language has been derided; their aspirations, national and individual, disregarded. This has bred in them a sensitiveness that is foreign to the coarser Saxon—a reserve that forms a crust about the manner that is repellent to the stranger, if in that stranger there be the smallest assumption of superiority. Yet underneath lies the richest, deepest, purest vein of golden love and goodwill that God, who formed the mountains and made man, ever buried in the human heart.

Shone had not married till he was some way past thirty, and then, perhaps, more for convenience than that passion which whirls most men into matrimony; and about a year after his marriage his wife gave him a little son, but did not recover the confinement, and died.

Shone was left alone in the cottage with a baby, and he had his daily work to accomplish in order that he and his baby might live. He could not neglect his work, and he would not neglect his baby. Some neighbours offered to relieve him of the child, but to this Shone was averse. The baby was his; it was almost the only living being that

was absolutely, indisputably his own. And now it was that the fountains of love in that closed and sealed heart opened and gushed forth. He loved that child with a love such as only a mother, one might have supposed, could entertain for a poor little, feeble, wailing lump of flesh.

Shone considered what he should do. He would not commit the child to Martha Rees, who had volunteered to take it, for she was a slovenly person, and he could not be sure that she would keep the little creature clean. Nor to Rachel Price, for she was violent tempered when put out: she might lose patience if the child cried, and maltreat it, though usually she was a most good-natured woman. Nor to Alice Tooker, for she was an Englishwoman, and he would not have his child reared save to the sound of the Welsh tongue, and sung to sleep with Welsh lullabies.

Then Shone formed his resolve—and to this he adhered for many, many months.

One morning Shone appeared among the men of his shift, presenting an aspect so surprising, that at first his mates were silent with astonishment, and then broke into laughter.

Shone had taken a sheet, and had cast it over his left shoulder, then wound it round him, thrown it over the right shoulder, and bound it about his waist like a plaid, and between his shoulders, safely bedded in the wraps, was his babe.

“Why, Shone, what have you brought the little kid here for?” was the general exclamation.

"To make a collier of him," answered Evans good-humouredly. He expected some chaff, and did not take it amiss—from his mates. But chaff would not deter him from carrying out his purpose.

And here it must be observed that throughout this story the conversation must be understood to be translated from the Welsh, and will be, accordingly, free from those colloquialisms or dialectic terms that would be natural had it been carried on by English speakers.

"Shone, you are not going to take the child down the pit, surely ?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then he must pay his footing !"

"You must give him something, mates, first with which to pay," said Evans. "Or, hold ! he will give you all round a swig at his bottle."

"His bottle ! You have brought that with you ?"

"Certainly," said Evans, and produced a feeder. "Who will have a smack ? Drink to the health of the new hand !"

"Not I," said one, "in milk and water !"

"We would not deprive him of the least taste !" said another.

Instinctively, and at once, these rough men understood and appreciated Shone's conduct ; he might have to, and he did, encounter good-natured jokes—he was called "Mammy Shone," but nothing was said in ridicule that could wound. In every heart there sprang up great respect for Shone ; and as to the babe, he became the pet of the coalpit.

Thenceforth, whether Evans were on day or night shift, when he went down to his work the child went with him, lodged between his shoulder-blades. When he reached his place where he had to work, he unfolded the sheet—often grimy, it could not be other—made up a nest of it among lumps of coal, and placed the little creature in the folds, with its feeding-bottle accessible. And as he toiled he turned his head over his shoulder every now and then to say an endearing word, and to soothe the child should it begin to cry.

When the men assembled for a meal, there were consultations held as to what was suitable for the stomach if griped, or the gums, should there appear a rash about the chin and lips; also as to whether the proportions of milk and sugar and water were correct; and a lively and heated discussion broke out relative to a suggestion made by one collier that he had known a drop of gin added with the best possible effects—not, of course, regularly, but when there was stomach-ache. Moreover, in the relaxation from work, the babe was passed round and dandled and fondled, admired and remarked upon by the colliers, and fulsome expressions of admiration were lavished upon it, which may or may not have been appropriate; but seeing that the infant succeeded in begriming its face and entire body with coal-dust after the first few minutes that it had been below, it was not possible for any one to pronounce a well-balanced and justified opinion on its personal appearance.

However, affection sees not with ordinary eyes, and as the child was loved by every man and boy in the pit, its beauties were accepted as absolutely beyond dispute.

Now although every collier set himself up to be an authority on baby-culture, and pumped his wife for information which he might retail as his own, acquired experimentally, when next he was below, yet there was an elderly man named Ebenezer Llewellyn who had been the father of fourteen children, ten of which were living, and who was, therefore, by common consent, regarded as a principal authority on the management of babies; and when Ebenezer pronounced an opinion, all bowed to it, whether on the constitution of milk or the adoption of fuller's earth. Llewellyn did not hold by violet powder; he said coal-dust was better, if sufficiently fine.

On one occasion, in a panic, Shone rushed after Ebenezer to another portion of the pit to bid him come to his assistance—the child was strangling. According to his account it had got a lump of coal into its mouth twice as big as its head, and Shone could not get it out.

"There is no room in the mouth for my finger to be inserted so as to whisk it out. Come quick, Llewellyn, or the child will be dead—it is black in the face."

"But it always is," said Ebenezer.

"I mean turning black between the coal grains and where its tears have washed the face. Come at once."

The father of fourteen, that man of wide experience, obeyed. He sat down, took the infant on his lap, and dexterously with his little finger worked the piece of coal out of the mouth ; whereupon the babe set up a howl that rang down the passages of the mine.

"I will tell you what is in prospect," said Llewellyn sententiously. "This kid is getting to use his hands. He will lay hold of everything he can touch, and he will put whatever he grips into his mouth. They all do it. I have had fourteen and have raised ten, so I ought to know. This is the most critical period in the lives of little ones, and if you don't mind, he'll eat up all your output every day—truckloads of coals he'll put away, if you let him."

"But I will not allow him."

"Then you must sit over him and watch his every movement."

"I cannot do that."

"There it is that women come in to be of some use in the world. They can look after male babies when they are in the grabbing and devouring age—that's about teething time. You see how he dribbles. That," pursued Ebenezer gravely—"that comes of the gums being strained and painful. Babes, at this period, must bite—it's a necessity. They will bite anything. I've had fourteen, so I ought to know. This is a terribly critical time."

Shone left the pit that day depressed and meditative. As it happened, he encountered the doctor, who hailed him—

"What, Evans! still nursing your baby?"

"Yes, sir," answered the collier gravely. "I had a bit of difficulty with him to-day; he shovelled about half a ton of coals into his mouth, and Ebenezer Llewellyn and I had a sight of trouble in getting him to disgorge."

"You take my advice as a sensible man," said the surgeon. "It is, first, if you value the child, to give it more sun and air; it wants it. Sun and air are more than beef and bread. If the little chap were not as black as a hedgehog, curled up there at your back, I should say it was bleached like sea-kale. It won't do, Shone. The child now must be brought up upon another system; that is, if you desire it to live and be healthy and happy—unless you have insured its life, and want to get it under ground altogether, so as to pocket the insurance money."

Evans turned as blank as he could, considering the grime on his face. His jaw dropped.

"But wherever am I to put him?" he asked.

"Now, I have been wanting to see you about this for some while," said the surgeon, who was a thoroughly good-hearted man, and who valued and admired Shone. "There is Shian Thomas, the dressmaker, as good and steady a wench as I know. She is very badly off. She has been caring for her poor little crippled sister for several years. Now the child is dead, and she has had heavy expenses, what with doctor's bill—mine, you know——"

"Ah!" said Evans, "I know better than that. You were never hard on the widow or the orphan. What is hard, is to get you to take anything for your trouble when folks are in need themselves."

"Well, well! there was the funeral and the mourning," said the doctor, laughing and colouring at the same time. "Now Shian [Jane] mopes for the loss of her sister, and I am sure—I am as sure of this as of anything—that if you confided the young shaver to her, it would be good for her, good for the child, and"—he said the last words as he turned away—"in the end might be good for you."

Evans walked on his way meditatively. He did not act at once. He waited a day or two. But as the acquisitiveness of the babe became more pronounced, he resolved to put it beyond temptation, where it could not devour coals; and so he arranged with Shian Thomas that she should look after his child at such time, day and night, as he was at work. But as soon as ever he returned from the pit, whether in the very early morning before dawn, or whether in the afternoon, he was to reclaim the child and carry it home with him. He would not be in the house without it; but he brought himself to admit that now it was advisable, if not necessary, that it should no longer go down the pit with him till, as he said, "he comes of age and takes it upon himself."

He undertook to make a small payment to Shian for her trouble, which was of assistance to her in her then straitened circumstances.

"And you may reckon on this, Shone," said she, "I'll take every bit as much care of him as if he were my own. There is an empty place in my house, and in my heart, since I have lost Bessie, and I will put the little man there."

A couple of weeks under the care of Shian told on the child. He put on fat, became more merry, crowed, chirped, and waxed rosy.

It was a delight to his father to see him, and he did not always return from the pit alone. One day he brought with him Ebenezer Llewellyn to criticise the babe and judge whether the improvement was real or fictitious. He, a father of fourteen children, ten of whom he had reared, after weighing the little one and turning down his lips to see if the colour were red, gave verdict that was favourable. Then came what Shian called "the committee," a body of workmen on the shift with Shone, to see with their own eyes that all was going on well with the "shaver." He belonged to the pit, and all the men felt an interest in him, and all wanted to be satisfied that the child was flourishing. All wished to have their say about him, and to give Shian advice as to how he was to be dieted and clothed.

More critical than the rest was Shone, and the dressmaker was obliged to be forbearing with him, for his criticism became at times captious. As, for instance, on one occasion when he came to resume the child and found she had cut out for its amusement a score of dancing men and women, the latter with tall Welsh hats, holding hands, capering

vigorously—she had cut them with her scissors out of a sheet of folded paper—Shone put on a grave face.

"I think you should not have encouraged levity in the boy," said he. "I wouldn't have the idea put into his head that men and women are created to dance."

"But, Shone, they are only paper."

"Paper or flesh and blood is all the same. They are dancing. I don't like it. You can't be too careful with a child. It's just when they're young that they take in ideas, as they do nourishment—they suck it in in buckets."

"How would you have me cut them out?—walking to chapel?"

"That would be better."

"Shone, if I do that, I must make them prance. One cannot cut out these paper men and women without giving them high action. You would not have a whole train of them prancing to church like war-horses!"

The fact of the case was that Shone was slightly jealous. His child had taken to Shian, he clung to her, dabbed his little mouth over her cheek—in kisses, and was distinctly more happy with her than with his father.

Shone was conscious of it, and fought against it. He reasoned with himself; but could not reason himself out of his jealousy.

Had his child not put on fat, not gained in colour—had it become peevish, he would have blamed the

young woman, and taken it away. But when not only Ebenezer, but also the "committee," and his own consciousness assured him that all was well with the infant—better than it had been when it lived half its time underground—then he could not withdraw it from Shian, save for those hours when he was free from work.

So matters went on for a while, and then the situation became aggravated, for the child began to cry when he took it in his arms to remove it, and stretched forth its little hands to Shian, and sobbed, and would not be comforted by the father. It fretted when at home, it screamed, moaned, was restless. Shone thought it must be ill, and consulted a doctor; he battled against the assurance that nothing ailed the child, save its temporary separation from the woman who was as a mother to it.

He worked himself into excitement against Shian; she was stealing his child's heart from him. But his good sense returned. She was not willingly doing this. It was due to the irresistible. The natural nurse of a babe is a woman, and not a man, and the child instinctively clings to the nurse.

"I pay her six shillings for it," grumbled Shone. "He ought to understand that she is a hireling and not his mother."

This he said to the doctor, to whom, perhaps unguardedly, he had let out what embittered his heart.

"Quite so, Evans," answered the surgeon. "But

as the child has not as yet reached the age of reason in which it can draw such distinctions, why do you not make Shian its mother?"

Shone opened his eyes, stared at his adviser, turned his back, and walked away.

But the advice stuck.

Here was a solution to the difficulty, yet not one very pleasing to the collier. He brooded over his wrong, and also over the redress that lay open to him. Not a word could be said against Shian. She was a quiet, hard-working, steady girl.

Shone had taken to her stockings to be darned, garments to be mended, and had paid her for her work. He was obliged occasionally to call in the aid of a charwoman to do his washing, and also to clean up his house. As to his bit of cooking, he did that himself, but was not skilful at the fire and oven. He fared poorly, and was not infrequently out of sorts—the cause, his own bad cooking. Now all these inconveniences would be rectified had he a wife—and yet—and yet—Shone shook his head.

Then an epidemic of scarlet fever broke out in the Dulais Valley. Shone was frightened. For the sake of his child he considered what was to be done. Some provision must be made. If the little one sickened, who was to attend to it?—and attention it would need day and night. The proper person would be Shian—a stranger would never do. But Shian—he could not bid her nurse the child in his house, and to have it throughout the

long sickness in hers, and he not with it—that would never do. Besides, she was a dressmaker. She could not take in needlework when there was risk of infection in her house. Shone stamped. What was to be done?

"How is it?" he asked, as he came back from the pit.

"Very well, Shone. As usual, very cheerful."

"No signs of a sore throat? Have you looked?"

"None at all."

"But suppose he were to get it?"

"Get what?"

"The scarlatina."

"You need not suppose it. He is quite well."

"We must provide against the worst."

"The worst, Shone!"

"Oh!" with a shiver, "I do not mean the worst at all—God forbid; but against his catching the fever."

"Well, what will you do?"

"Do, Shian? There is nothing else to be done but for you to marry me. You see—I do it for the babe's sake, and because of the infection."

She was surprised—a little amused.

"And," put in Shone, a little apologetically, "there are my stockings want mending. But, really, for the child's sake, I wish it."

"I suppose, Shone, if the poor little chap were to be taken ill, he'd be removed from here?"

"No doubt of it. The sanitary officer wouldn't allow it here."

"Nor could I nurse it?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, Shone, for the scarlatina's sake I don't mind if I do take you."

"Then," said Shone, "we must look sharp. Let me see his throat. He might have it come on sudden. I'll get a license."

It was certainly an odd proposal and a queer acceptance, and no expense was spared.

"Bless me," said Shone, "for the child's sake, and because of the scarlet fever, I will stump up a guinea for the license."

So Shone and Shian were married; and the child did not get scarlatina—so that all this trouble and expense were, in Shone's eyes, thrown away.

"Might just as well have chucked it all down a disused coalpit!" said he.

Positively he became grumpy and querulous because his child showed no signs of drowsiness, sore throat, and eruption. Not that he wished it to be ill, but he wanted a justification of his marriage.

Shian did her utmost to make him comfortable. She brought the cottage to a condition of scrupulous cleanliness; she took in hand all his clothes, she mended them, and made some that he had discarded as neat as new. She did the washing in a manner very different from that of the charwoman. Above all, she cooked really-appetising meals that made Shone's face relax.

No sooner did he return from the pit than at once she put the child in his arms. She made no

attempt to stand between it and the father. On the contrary, she talked to the little creature of its daddy when he was away, and encouraged it to look out for his return. Indeed, as he came up the street every day, he could see Shian at the door holding up the child; he could see its arms extended, and the hands clapping with pleasure at his appearance.

Shian felt that she was an accessory, not a prime factor in the house and in the well-being of Shone—the baby was the monarch, engrossing all his affection, occupying all his thoughts. She was accepted as a necessity, as conducing to the health and happiness of the child—one who could be and would be dispensed with unless needed for the child's sake. But she was a patient, sweet, and uncomplaining woman. She was not a little sad at heart, and the tears often filled her eyes. She coveted some of the kisses, some of the endearing terms lavished on the child—some, also, of the glow of love that lit up the father's eyes as he watched his babe. Oh, if only, as he returned from the pit, he had looked at her a little—just a little—instead of fixing his eyes, from the first moment he saw it till he had it in his arms, on the child. But she had been taken into the house, had become Shone's wife, for the sake of the child; and she submitted to be regarded with just so much consideration as behaved a dutiful servant to the little one.

Time went on. Shone began to mend in spirits. He looked more respectable on Sundays; his

digestion was better; he had no more unpleasant attacks after a meal of what might have been beef, but was leather, which had troubled him at one time. He had now Yorkshire pudding dipped in gravy; he had not that in the days of his widowership.

He began to have words for Shian relative to other topics than the baby. She caught him, by the firelight—as he smoked in the evening and she knitted—observing her attentively.

Then came Christmas Day.

Now there were sprigs of holly stuck in the windows and about the mantelpiece. The fire blazed, and was reflected in the burnished Bristol ware that shone on the dresser as though real copper. And there was a savoury smell in the house.

"Goose!" exclaimed Shone. "By the powers —goose! And sage and onions," said he, after a pause—"I smell them. Goodness me, I wish the boy were old enough to enjoy it all."

"Here, father," said Shian, as she laid the dinner—"here you are—goose, yes; onion and sage—yes. You would not have goose alone, surely?"

"Well," said Shone, and his face beamed with peace and goodwill, "well—to—be—sure."

"And"—when the first course was over—"I have another pleasure in store for you."

"That is—"

"See!" Shian introduced a little Christmas tree, manufactured out of a branch of fir, and to it were

hung two—just two—articles: a cap lined with swansdown, and trimmed with cherry ribbons, and a long pair of newly-knitted stockings. “There,” said Shian, “for baby and you—your Christmas presents. I bring it now, whilst he is awake, that he may enjoy it with us.”

“Well,” gasped Shone, “this is delightful! How lovely the child will look in such a glorious bonnet. And how warm my legs will be in these beautiful stockings.”

“That is not all,” said Shian.

“What more can there be?”

“This!” And she dished up a real Christmas plum-pudding.

When Shone saw this the tears came into his eyes.

“Why, Shian!” he said, and felt a pinch of the heart, “you have thought for every one but yourself!”

“No, no, father,” said she. “I have had some of the goose, and shall of the plum-pudding.”

“Some—some!” said he impatiently. “But there is nothing for yourself particularly.”

Then he jumped up, ran behind her at table, caught her head in his arms, pressed her face to his heart, and covered brow and lips with kisses.

“O Shian! You have my love—my very heart!”

“Because of—baby?”

“No, not only; because—”

“Of the goose?”

"No—no, not only ; because——"

"Of the plum-pudding ?"

"No—no ; I mean——"

"Because of the long stockings ?"

"No, Shian ; because of yourself, your own dear, sweet self—the best in the world !"

"That is my Christmas box, Shone ! You could not have given me a better."

HENRY FROST



HENRY FROST

THERE is no myth relative to the manners and customs of the English that in my experience is more tenaciously held by the ordinary Frenchman, than that the sale of a wife in the market-place is an habitual and an accepted fact in English life.

It is—so far as my experience goes—quite useless to assure a Frenchman that such transfer of wives is not a matter of every-day occurrence and is not legal; he replies, with an expression of incredulity, that of course English people endeavour to make light of, or deny a fact that is “notorious.”

In a book by the antiquary Colin de Plancy, on Legends and Superstitions connected with the Sacraments, he gives up some pages to an account of the prevalent English custom.

When I was in France a few years ago, in a town church in the south, I heard an abbé once preach on marriage, and contrast its indissolubility in Catholic France with the laxity in Protestant England, where “any one, when tired of his wife, puts a halter round her neck, takes her to the next market town and sells her for what she will fetch.” I ventured to call on this abbé and remonstrate, but he answered me he had seen

the fact stated in books of the highest authority, and that my disputing the statement did not prove that his authorities were wrong, but that my experience was limited, and he asked me point-blank whether I had never known such cases. There, unhappily, he had me on the hip. And when I was obliged to confess that I *did* know of one such case, "Mais, voilà, mon Dieu," said he, and shrugged his shoulders with a triumphant smile.

Now it must be allowed that such sales have taken place, and that this is so is due to rooted conviction in the rustic mind that such a transaction is legal and morally permissible.

The case I knew was this.

There lived a tall, thin man in the parish when I was a boy, who was the village poet. Whenever an event of any consequence took place within the confines of the parish, such as the marriage of the squire's daughter, he came down to the manor-house with a copy of verses he had composed on the occasion, and was then given his dinner and a crown. Now this man had actually bought his wife for half-a-crown. Her husband had led her into Okehampton and had sold her there in the market. The poet purchased her for half the sum he had received for one of his poems, and led her home with him, a distance of twelve miles, by the halter, he holding it in his hand, she placidly, contentedly, wearing the loop about her neck.

The report that Henry Frost was leading home his half-crown wife preceded the arrival of the couple,

and when they entered the village all the inhabitants turned out to see the spectacle.

Now this arrangement was not very satisfactory to either squire or rector, and both intervened. Henry Frost maintained that Anne was his legitimate wife, for "he had not only bought her in the market, but had led her home, with the halter in his hand, and he'd take his Bible oath that he never took the halter off her till she had crossed his doorstep and he had shut the door."

The parson took down the Bible, the squire "Burn's Justice of Peace," and strove to convince Harry that his conduct was warranted by neither Scripture nor the law of the land. "I don't care," he said, "her's my wife, as sure as if we was spliced at the altar, for and because I paid half-a-crown, and I never took off the halter till her was in my house; lor' bless yer honours, you may ask any one if that ain't marriage, good, sound, and Christian, and every one will tell you it is."

Mr. Henry Frost lived in a cottage that was on lives, so the squire was unable to bring compulsion to bear on him.

When I call the man Frost, I am not employing his real name, because his relatives are alive, and I know them very well.

Frost, as already intimated, was village bard or poet. I remember well his coming down to the house with a poem on a transaction of my father's, the advisability of which I now greatly doubt.

In our village, the "revel" was kept up every

year on the first Sunday after Trinity Sunday, and the week following. A revel in Devonshire is the equivalent of the wake in other parts of England, and of the feast in Cornwall. It used to be celebrated on the day of the saint to whom the parish church is dedicated. But when the new style came into use, the conservative rustic mind resisted the change and adhered to the computation according to the unrevised calendar. Accordingly, in most places the feast or revel is eleven days after the day of the patron saint. In some places, however, it is movable. Now our church is dedicated to St. Peter, accordingly our revel ought to be on the nearest Sunday after June 29. It is rare indeed that the first Sunday after Trinity should fall so late, and impossible, I believe, that it could synchronise with old-style St. Peter's Day. In 1899 the first Sunday after Trinity was on June 4—twenty-five days before new-style St. Peter's Day, and thirty-six before the feast reckoned by the old style.

There is, however, some reason to believe that the earlier dedication was to St. Petrock, whose day is June 4, and that the title of the church was altered in 1261, when reconsecrated. The bishops of Exeter always endeavoured to get rid of the patron saints when belonging to the Celtic Church, and substitute for them some who were in the Roman calendar.

The revel at Lew Trenchard agreed much more closely with St. Petrock's Day than with that of St. Peter the Apostle.

However, this is neither here nor there. The revel

was kept up with shows, a fair, and horse-races, and it must be allowed there was some drunkenness.

My father, as squire, and in those days an autocrat, disapproved of the revel and abolished it, and substituted for it a cottage garden show, on no very determined date. The revel has never recovered, and the flower show, after living for two years, died a natural death.

I do not myself believe in the destruction of any ancient institution. Let it be reformed, but never abolished.

Well, now to the point.

Henry Frost appeared on the occasion of the first flower show with a poem composed to celebrate the birth of the cottage garden exhibition and the burial of the revel. It was very laudatory of my father, and every verse concluded with the refrain—

“For he had a most expansive mind.”

He had used incredible effort to obtain suitable rhymes. In one verse he had—

“In laudable efforts he was not behind,
For, &c.”

Another ran—

“To drunken abuses never was blind,
For, &c.”

Another, in doubtful grammar, ran—

“Among his compères greatly he shined,
For, &c.”

“Ah,” said my father, “all Henry Frost thinks

of in his innermost mind is that I should have a most expansive pocket, and that he may be able to get drunk on what he draws from it in reward for his poem."

When Anne died, then a difficulty arose: under what name was she to be entered in the register? The parson insisted that he could not and he would not enter her as Anne Frost, for that was not her legal name. Then Henry was angry, and carried her off to be buried in another parish, where the parson was unacquainted with the circumstances. I must say that Anne proved an excellent "wife." She was thrifty, clean, and managed a rough-tempered and rough-tongued man with great tact, and was generally respected. She died in or about 1843.

Much later than that there lived a publican some miles off, whom I knew very well; indeed he was the namesake of and first cousin to a carpenter in my constant employ. He bought his wife for a stone two-gallon jar of Plymouth gin, if I was informed aright. She had belonged to a stonemason, but as he was dissatisfied with her, he put up a written notice in several public places to this effect—

NOTICE.

This here be to hinform the publick as how G—— C—— be dispozed to sell his wife by Auction. Her be a dacent, clanely woman, and be of age twenty-five ears. The sale be to take place in the . . . Inn, Thursday next at seven o'clock.

In this case also I do not give the names, as the woman is, I believe, still alive. I believe—as I was told—that the foreman of the works remonstrated, and insisted that such a sale would be illegal. He was not, however, clear as to the points of law, and he asserted that it would be illegal unless the husband held an auctioneer's license, and if money passed. This was rather a damper. However, the husband was very desirous to be freed from his wife, and he held the sale as he had advertised, making the woman stand on a table, and he armed himself with a little hammer. The biddings were to be in kind and not in money. One man offered a coat, but as he was a small man and the seller was stout, when he found that the coat would not fit him he refused it. Another offered a "phisgie," *i.e.* a pick, but this also was refused, as the husband possessed a "phisgie" of his own. Finally the landlord offered a two-gallon jar of gin, and down fell the hammer with "gone."

I knew the woman; she was not bad looking. The new husband drank, and treated her very roughly, and on one occasion when I was lunching at the inn she had a black eye. I asked her how she had hurt herself. She replied that she had knocked her face against the door, but I was told that this was a result of a domestic brawl. Now, the remarkable feature in these cases is that it is impossible to drive the idea out of the heads of those who thus deal in wives that such a transaction is not sanctioned by law and religion. In a parish

register in my neighbourhood is the following entry—

1756. Robert Elford was baptized, child of Susanna Elford by her sister's husband; she was married with the consent of her sister, the wife, who was at the wedding.

In this instance there is no evidence of a *sale*, but we may be sure that money did pass and that the contractor of the new marriage believed it was a right and proper union, although perhaps irregular; and the first wife unquestionably believed that she was acting in observance of a legal right in transferring her husband to her sister. There are instances in which country people have gone before a local solicitor and have had a contract of sale drawn up for the disposal of their wives. The Birmingham police court in 1853 had to adjudicate on such a case, and the astounding thing in this instance was that a lawyer could be found to draw up the contract. It is no wonder that the magistrates administered a very severe reprimand. But there was a far earlier case than this—that of Sir William de Paganel. The lady stoutly and indignantly resisted the transfer, and appealed against the contract to the law, which declared the sale to be null and void.

In 1815 a man held a regular auction in the market-place at Pontefract, offering his wife at a minimum bidding of one shilling, but he managed to excite a competition, and she was finally knocked down for eleven shillings.

In 1820 a man named Brouchet led his wife, a decent, pleasant-looking woman, but with a tongue in her mouth, into the cattle-market at Canterbury from the neighbouring village of Broughton. He required a salesman to dispose of her, but the salesman replied that his dealings were with cattle only, and not with women. Brouchet, not to be beaten, thereupon hired a cattle-pen, paying sixpence for the hire, and led his wife into it by the halter that was round her neck. She did not fetch a high figure, being disposed of to a young man of Canterbury for five shillings.

In 1832, on 7th April, a farmer named Joseph Thomson came into Carlisle with his wife, to whom he had been married three years before; he sent the bellman round the town to announce a sale, and this attracted a great crowd. At noon the sale took place. Thomson placed his wife on a chair, with a rope of straw round her neck. He then said —according to the report in the “Annual Register,”—“Gentlemen, I have to offer to your notice, my wife, Mary Anne Thomson, otherwise Williams, whom I mean to sell to the highest and fairest bidder. Gentlemen, it is her wish as well as mine to part for ever. She has been to me only a born serpent. I took her for my comfort, and the good of my home; but she became my tormentor, a domestic curse. Gentlemen, I speak the truth from my heart when I say—may God deliver us from troublesome wives and frolicsome women! Avoid them as you would a mad dog, or a roaring lion, a

loaded pistol, cholera morbus, Mount Etna, or any other pestilential thing in nature. Now I have shown you the dark side of my wife, and told you her faults and failings, I will introduce the bright and sunny side of her, and explain her qualifications and goodness. She can read novels and milk cows; she can laugh and weep with the same ease that you could take a glass of ale when thirsty. Indeed, gentlemen, she reminds me of what the poet says of women in general—

‘Heaven gave to women the peculiar grace
To laugh, to weep, to cheat the human race.’

She can make butter and scold the maid; she can sing Moore’s melodies, and plait her frills and caps; she cannot make rum, gin, or whisky, but she is a good judge of the quality from long experience in tasting them. I therefore offer her with all her perfections and imperfections for the sum of fifty shillings.”

That this sermon was spoken by Thomson is most improbable — it is doubtless put into his mouth by the editor of the “Annual Register”; it was not to his interest to depreciate the article he desired to sell. After about an hour the woman was knocked down to one Henry Mears, for twenty shillings and a Newfoundland dog. They then parted company in perfect good - humour, each satisfied with his bargain; Mears and the woman went one way, and Thomson and the dog another.

In 1835 a man led his wife by a halter, in pre-

cisely the same way, into the market at Birmingham, and sold her for fifteen pounds. She at once went home with the purchaser. She survived both buyer and seller, and then married again. Some property came to her in the course of years from her first husband; for notwithstanding claims put forth by his relatives she was able to maintain in a court of law that the sale did not and could not vitiate her rights as his widow.

Much astonishment was caused in 1837 in the West Riding of Yorkshire by a man being committed to prison for a month with hard labour for selling or attempting to sell his wife by auction in the manner already described. It was generally and firmly believed that he was acting within his rights.

In 1858, in a tavern at Little Horton, near Bradford, a man named Hartley Thomson put up his wife, who is described by the local journals as a pretty young woman, for sale by auction, and he had the sale previously announced by sending round the bellman. He led her into the market with a ribbon round her neck, which exhibits an advance in refinement over the straw halter; and again in 1859, a man at Dudley disposed of his wife in a somewhat similar manner for sixpence. A feature in all these instances is the docility with which the wife submits to be haltered and sold. She would seem to have been equally imbued with the idea that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the transaction, and that it was perfectly legal.

If we look to see whence originated the idea, we

shall probably find it in the conception of marriage as a purchase. Among savage races, the candidate for marriage is expected to pay the father for his daughter. A marriageable girl is worth so many cows or so many reindeer. The man pays over a sum of money or its equivalent to the father, and in exchange receives the girl. If he desires to be separated from her he has no idea of giving her away, but receives what is calculated to be her market value from the man who is disposed to relieve him of her. In all dealings for cattle, or horses, or sheep, a handsel is paid, half-a-crown to clinch the bargain, and the transfer of coin constitutes a legal transfer of authority and property over the animal. This is applied to a woman, and when a coin, even a sixpence, is paid over and received, the receiver regards this as releasing him from all further possession of the wife, who at once passes under the hand of the purchaser. There is probably no trace in our laws of women having been thus regarded as negotiable properties, but it is unquestionable that at an early period, before Christianity invaded the island, such a view was held, and if here and there the rustic mind is unable to rise to a higher view of the marriage state, it shows how extremely slow it is for opinions to alter when education has been neglected.

M I L K - M A I D S

K



MILK-MAIDS

IT is a sad subject for reflection that, among the extinct animals, we should have to reckon the milk-maids of Old England—the theme of so much poetry, the subject of such charming pictures.

The dodo exists now solely in a few specimens preserved in glass cases in two or at the outside three museums. The mammoth is discovered rarely embedded in blocks of ice under the Arctic Circle. The gigantic moa of New Zealand is recovered only from its scattered bones. The Great Auk was last seen off the coast of Waterford in 1834. Her egg sells for about a hundred pounds. A species of the English milk-maid is said to exist on the High Alps, and is called the *Sennerin*, but is so unlike the milk-maid of English picture and story, that naturalists are disposed to dispute it as a species, and regard it as belonging to a different *genus*.

Again, those temperate and frugal beings who frequent the A.B.C. establishments in London, and get a drink of milk for a penny and sandwiches for twopence, will see there very interesting and even charming specimens of the modern milk-maid, but in build, in plumage, and in habit, totally unlike the

milk-maid we knew from nursery rhyme, and from illustrations. The old milk-maid—save the mark! the milk-maid was never old, her youth was perennial—I mean the milk-maid who lived and flourished in Britain till about 1834, when she disappeared along with the *alca impennis*—was fresh faced, rosy cheeked, strongly built, wore light cotton gowns and white aprons; carried her arms bare, sang cheerily as she went about her work, and had a tendency to become “bouncing.” Her habitat was a country farm, and she was to be found frequenting the fields, the cowshed, and the dairy.

The specimens exhibited by the Aerated Bread Company, on the other hand, are pale complexioned, somewhat lily faced, of a willowy build, always with plumage that is black, except for a white apron, the arms are clothed in black save for neat white cuffs about the wrists; they move silently, and are never seen in country pastures, only in A.B.C. refreshment places in London, and such large towns as can maintain these useful establishments.

But the difference extends further. The milk-maid of olden time was not exactly a wading, web-footed being, but she had large feet and shoes of the most solid, broad description, very necessary, as she was constrained to make her way through farm-yards over ankles in mud, or to go through the task of milking cows in byres or linneys that were—well, the reverse of clean. As to the

modern milk-maid, it suffices to look at her feet—like those described by Sir John Suckling,

“ Her feet beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice, steal in and out
As if they feared the light,”—

to be quite satisfied that she is not descended from, nor is a true variant of the milk-maid of olden time. The same Sir John Suckling admirably portrays the latter—

“ No grape that's kindly ripe could be,
So round, so plump, so soft as she,
Nor half so full of juice.”

It is obvious this does not describe the A.B.C. milklass. The latter is a banana, the former an apple.

“ Where are you going, my pretty maid?
I'm going a-milking, sir; she said.”

No maids now go a-milking, that is why there are no true milk-maids. The old order changeth. Nowadays in the country it is the men who milk. Women cannot be found to do it. They object to the trudge through the dirt, and the planting of the three-legged peggy-stool, and their feet in the oozy substance that forms the cushion enveloping the floor of the cow stall. I do not blame them. It is a dirty place.

But the milking of the cows in the byre was itself a novelty. Formerly the operation took place in the meadows, where it was clean enough, and

the feet were in the sweet grass. The milk-girl filled her pails, adjusted a hoop that they might not swing against and spill over her cotton dress, and carried the pails to the dairy, singing as she went. But the weather is not always bright, and it was not only unpleasant, but unsafe, to milk out of doors in the rain; so the cattle were driven under cover, and there the dirt speedily grew to be deep, and presently the girls found it intolerable to have to wade in mire, so the final stage was that they abandoned the milking to the men.

Do the cows like it as well? I trow not. Surely the woman's hand is best for the process. A woman instinctively knows how to milk. All men cannot acquire the art, and cows are well aware as to which are skilful milkers and which are not. A man may be a good milker, a woman always is one. That is the difference. What a charming sketch that is of Caldecott's of the "maid who milked the cow with the crumpled horn," in his illustrated story of the House that Jack Built! When our children nowadays recite that nursery doggerel, the words concerning that maid who milked the cow are not understood by them. They are an anachronism; for as soon as they know anything they know that no maiden all forlorn or all smiles, no maiden whatever, does now milk cows. And to conceive the idea of a "man all tattered and torn" approach and kiss such a milk-maid as occupies a position in an Aerated Bread Company's establishment, is to de-

mand of their young intelligences something too preposterous.

Do you remember old Izaak Walton's account of the milk-maid with her merry songs? How he asked her to sing to him. "What song was it?" she inquired. "I pray—was it 'Come, shepherds, deck your heads'; or 'As at noon Dulcina rested'; or 'Philida flouts me'; or 'Chevy Chace'; or 'Johnny Armstrong'; or 'Troy Town'?" The memories of the ancient milk-maids were storehouses of delightful old English ballads; now the only persons who know any are ancient silver-headed topers in taverns.

It was formerly the custom for the bonny milk-maids to dance before the houses of their customers in the month of May, to obtain a small gratuity; and there is a dear old English tune, "The merry milk-maids in green," that was probably the one to which they were wont to dance. To be a milk-maid and to be merry were synonymous terms in the olden time.

Pepys, in his diary, 13th October 1662, says, "With my father took a melancholy walk to Port-holme, seeing the country-maids milking their cows there, they being there now at grass; and to see with what mirth they come all home together in pomp with their milk, and sometimes they have music go before them."

In Beaumont and Fletcher's play, "The Coxcomb," printed in 1647, two milk-maids are introduced, Nan and Madge, and the scene in which they

are on the stage is so charming, that I venture to quote a good deal of it—the authors have so happily caught the kindness, the simplicity, the joyousness of the English milk-maid of yore.

But one word I must premise. *Viola*, the heroine of the play is astray and wandering over the country seeking to conceal whence she is and who she is.

Viola wearied and lost sighs—

“The evening comes and every little flower
Droops now, as well as I.”

Then enter *Nan* and *Madge* with milk pails.

“*Nan*. Good *Madge*,
Let's rest a little ; by my troth, I'm weary.
This new pail is a plaguy heavy one.

Madge. With all my heart.

Viola (*aside*). What true contented happiness dwells here,
More than in cities ! Would to God my father
Had lived like one of these, and bred me up
To milk, and do as they do. Methinks 'tis
A life that I would choose.

Maids !

For charity, give a poor wench one draught of milk,
That weariness and hunger have nigh famished !

Nan. If I'd but one cow's milk in all the world
You should have some on't : There, drink.

Madge. Do you dwell hereabouts ?

Viola. No ; would I did.

Nan. *Madge*, if she does not look as like my cousin Sue
O' th' Moor Lane, as one thing can look like another.

Madge. Nay ; Sue has a hazel eye, I know Sue well ;
And, by your leave, not so trim a body, neither ;
This is a flat-bodied thing, I can tell you.

Nan. She laces close,
By the Mass, I warrant you ; and so does Sue too.”

Then Viola entreats the two girls to find her where she may not only lodge, but also find work.

"*Nan.* Uds me, our Dorothy went away but last week,
And I know my mistress wants a maid, and why
May she not be placed there ? This is a likely wench,
I tell you truly, and a good wench, I warrant her.

Madge. And 'tis a hard case if we, that have served
Four years apiece, cannot bring in one servant.
We will prefer her . . . Can you milk a cow ?
And make a merry-bush ?

Viola. I shall learn quickly.

Nan. And dress a house with flowers ? and—
This you must do, for we deal in the dairy—
And make a bed or two ?

Viola. I hope I shall.

Nan. But be sure to keep the men out ; they will mar
All that you make else, I know that by myself ;
For I have been so touz'd among 'em in
My days ! Come, you shall e'en home with us,
And be our fellow ; our house is honest,
And we serve a very good woman and a gentle woman,
And we live as merrily, and dance o' good days
After evensong. Our wake shall be on Sunday ;
Do you know what a wake is ? we have mighty cheer then,
And such a coil, 't would bless ye !
You must be our sister, and love us best,
And tell us everything : and when cold weather
Comes, we'll lie together : will you do this ?

Viola. Yes.

Nan. Then home again, o' God's name."

We learn that Princess Elizabeth, in Queen Mary's reign, was closely guarded and only suffered to walk in the gardens of the palace, and not abroad. "In this situation," says Holingshed, "no marvell if she, hearing upon a time out of her

garden at Woodstock, a certain milk-maid singing pleasantlie, wished herself to be a milk-maid as she was; saying that her case was better, and life merrier."

Sir Thomas Overbury in his "Character of a milk-maid," in the reign of James I., says, "She dares go alone, and unfold her sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say truth, she is never alone, she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones."

There is still a reminiscence of the milk-maid that comes to us every spring, in the fresh flickering cuckoo-flower of the delicate lilac, like the pale cotton, of which the dresses of the girls were made. It is the *Cardamine pratensis* that bears both the name of "Milk-maids" and "Cuckoo-flower." The latter name it obtains, says old Gerarde, because it "doth flower in April and Maie, when the cuckoo doth begin to sing her pleasant notes without stammering." The same plant is also the "Lady's Smock" of Shakespeare. I suppose it will retain the name of cuckoo-flower, for the cuckoo is still with us, but lose that of "milk-maids," for, alas—milk-maids are no more.

The Alpine representative of the class is quite distinct. As soon as the high pastures are free from snow, the cattle are driven up the mountains and the women go with them. They remain at these high altitudes all the summer till the first frosts and snows come, when they, with the cattle,

return. On the high Alps they have to milk the cows and make cheeses. They live in *senn hüte* (wooden hovels), and sleep in the lofts among the hay. Here is a description by a native of the Alps.

"The Sennerin is engaged through the summer with tubs and churns; she attends to the milking and the fodder. An Almbub, a little boy, is with her, and he has to look after the herds, drive the cattle to pasture, and bring them back at even. Both live on the boiled milk and some lard out of a pot. Then when darkness comes on they light the *kichspan*, a bit of firwood dipped in pitch that serves as a candle, and by its flare she mends his torn garments which must be made to last till they return in October; and the boy in turn takes between his knees her shoes which have been torn in the rocks, and sews the rents with waxed thread, and tells tales or sings songs.

"For the most part the sennerin is not under twenty. She is generally over forty, one who has spent her life in making butter, and understands the cows. And every summer she is aloft since she became old enough to be trusted. Young women, the farmer knows well, do not answer on the Alpine pastures exposed to every sort of climate and weather. And yet—sometimes, a young one is there aloft, and then romance steps in."

These sennerins, old, withered, for the most part, in rusty and dark dresses, with storm and sun-tanned faces, wrinkled, eminently unpoetical objects,

how can we consider them as of the same race as our recently extinct dairy-maids?

I will end with a couple of verses of Martin Parker's ballad on the Milk-maids, composed in the reign of James I. or Charles I.

"The bravest lasses gay
Live not so merry as they ;
In honest civil sort
They make each other sport,
As they trudge on their way.
Come fair or foul weather,
They're fearful of neither—
Their courages never quail :
In wet and dry, though winds be high,
And dark's the sky, they ne'er deny
To carry the milking pail.

Their hearts are free from care,
They never will despair ;
Whatever may befall,
They bravely bear out all,
And Fortune's frowns out-dare.
They pleasantly sing
To welcome the spring—
'Gainst heaven they never rail ;
If grass will grow, their shanks they show ;
And, frost or snow, they merrily go
Along with the milking pail."

THE BRIDE'S WELL



THE BRIDE'S WELL

ON what is locally called a Ramp, that is to say the refuse thrown out of a quarry, and left to decay or become covered with mould, was, in our quiet parish, a long white-washed cottage thatched. It was planted in a peculiar position: its back was against a dense oak wood, out of which shot up Scotch firs, and the portion of ramp it occupied was of very old standing, and was a good way from that part of the quarry on which workmen were engaged.

In front of the cottage was a garden, always well kept, and on the farther side of the garden, the inevitable pig-sty. But then—what would the garden have produced without the pig?

When I said that the cottage was on the ramp, I was not quite exact, it was on the slope of the hill, but ramp had been thrown up before it even to a level above the garden, so that the dwellers in the cottage were almost as much shut in as was Noah in his ark.

The ramp was not hideous, as new ramps are. It was so ancient that it was overgrown with trees, and moss, and fern. The crane's-bill loved to ramble about it, and the wild strawberry covered it in June with a network of rubies.

The cottage was so closed about that every wind was shut out, but the sun flowed over it, frost rarely smote and killed the vegetables in the garden, and flowers came there earlier than elsewhere.

A great monthly rose was trained over the front of the house, and I believe that there were flowers on it all the year round.

Near the cottage stood a very ancient and wide-spreading oak, stunted and contorted, because growing in a minimum of soil and a maximum of slate rock. But in spite of disadvantages, the oak was very aged and bore innumerable acorns. Under the shade of the tree, rained over with shed acorns at the fall of the year, was a slab of rock, and it went by the name of the Conjuring Table. There was a certain Lady who was fondly believed, though dead for over a century, to haunt the parish. The story went that Seven Parsons met at this natural table to lay the Lady's ghost. They would have succeeded but that one of the party was so tipsy that he said the wrong words and forgot the right.

But that which haunted the ramp was not a ghost, it was vipers, locally called "Long Cripples." These creatures loved to lie in the sun on the hot slates, and they became so comatose in the heat, or perhaps with repletion from the number of flies and beetles they ate, that they were easily killed there by the village lads.

Now, although the cottage was in a lonely place, and was shut in from wind and from the sight of men, unless these latter came there purposely to

see it, yet there was that in it which precluded its being out of mind, however much out of sight, and that was—an uncommonly pretty girl who lived in it with her father and mother.

Their name was Worden, and her Christian name was Prue, that is to say, Prudence.

Not only was she vastly pretty, but she was one of the happiest, brightest dispositioned girls in the place. The sun that loved the cottage seems to have been drunk in by her heart and to brim at her eyes.

Prue managed the beehives, of which there was a row in the garden, and she moved among the winged creatures without their attempting to sting her. "Talk to them, sing to them, and they become your friends," she said.

They buzzed round her, as though she were a flower, as though they would light on her laughing lips, and she scolded them and away they flew—it was their fun, that was all, she explained. But it was not bees only that came about Prue. Village youths are not blind to female beauty, and hearts open at once to a bright spirit, as celandines open to the sun.

Prue had plenty of admirers, but her head was not turned; she laughingly kept them at a distance—that is to say, all but one, George Kennaway, and it soon became an understood thing that George also would not allow other young men to buzz about Prue. That flower was for his own sipping, not for another's.

How this came about was as follows:—

The plank on which stood the beehives had become so rotten that Prue's father, Roger Worden, purchased a good new Dantzic pine plank to replace that which was decayed.

The substitution must be made at night. So the plank was laid near the Conjuring Stone till the occasion came for its use. There were also there two or three short lengths of firbole, whereof to make props for the plank; as not only was Worden about to renew the old stand, but also to extend it, to sustain additional hives; until wanted, the plank was at Prue's disposal, and she thus disposed it. She placed it across one of the logs and endeavoured to play at see-saw on it. This could only be effected by reducing the length of plank on her side to a couple of feet, and giving the other side a considerable extent. But this did not answer satisfactorily; it gave very little sway to the end on which Prue sat. She therefore tried another experiment. She rolled a big stone on to the farther end of the board, but here again the success was not great, as the stone tumbled off.

So engaged was Prue in endeavouring to obtain a ride by circumventing the difficulties that stood in her way, that she did not observe George Kennaway as he approached; and he startled her into dropping from the board when he said close to her, "You are a silly child. It takes two to play at see-saw."

"Then you sit at the other end," said Prue,

picking herself up. She was flushed, and looked prettier than ever under the white cotton field bonnet.

"Certainly," said the lad, "but b'aint it rather child's play?"

"I never had brothers and sisters to play see-saw with me," explained she.

"And are you so terrible fond of it?"

"I don't know. I haven't tried proper yet."

"Come—you shall have a ride."

So the young man sat at one end astride, and the girl at the other as on a chair, and up and down they went. When he was aloft she was down, and when she soared he was on the ground. She laughed for joy of heart—then suddenly jumped off, and down in an ignominious, precipitate, and ungraceful manner fell George, sprawling on the ground.

"I had forgot," said Prue.

"I should think you had—to give me such a fall."

"I don't mean that—I mean the water."

"What water?"

"Mother wanted the pitchers filled."

"Immediately?"

"N—n—o, but I just remembered it, so sprang off."

"And sent me down."

"I am sorry—did I hurt you?"

"You might have hurt me badly."

"Let me go fetch the water and then we'll see-saw again."

"But understand there must be two together—always, for that."

The cottage was supplied from a well that was some sixty to eighty feet below its level. From the oak and the Conjuring Stone a path descended to an old excavation, very deep, and so overhung with trees, and so limited in extent, that the sun never fell into it. At the bottom was deep bottle-green water—how deep none knew, and in it lived—so it was said—one enormous trout, too wary and well fed to allow himself to be caught. The slate sides of this abyss were hung with moss and fern and tendrils of creeping plants. A little way from this tremendous chasm, but only a few feet higher than the water's edge was a well, that is to say a spring with the sides built up and a slab of slate covering it, in which was the coolest, most crystalline water. This spring never failed in the hottest summer, and its overflow trickled into the tarn that occupied the ancient, deserted quarry. It was a long way to go to get water for all requirements, but the water when got was most refreshing and delicious.

At least twice a day Prue had to descend to the well with empty pitchers, and toil up the ascent with them laden.

"And mind this, Prue," said her mother repeatedly, "never you go no farther than the well, for the slate rock beyond by the water is that slippy you might fall in, and none ever hear you cry out."

The whole way down was so thick with crane's-bill that the air was strong with its geranium savour.

"No," said George. "For once, Prue, I will fetch the water, and you bide here."

Then the young man caught up the brown pitchers and descended the path. In ten minutes he was back with them brimming over.

"Now," said Prue, "we will have another swing, only I will sit nearer the middle. I do not want to have a bad fall."

"Why should you have a bad fall?"

"You might punish me for giving you one."

"I am not like to do that."

"I had rather not trust you."

So they swayed up and down.

Then said Prue: "Why do you sit nearer the middle than I?"

"Because I am three times as heavy as you and must make the balance right."

"It is still rather too much."

"Then draw nearer."

"But you will draw nearer still?"

"I must. I cannot help it. Now then—try how it feels in the middle." He put out his arm and drew her to the midst above the fulcrum, and there they sat, side by side, gently rocking. The least displacement of balance set them swaying.

"Lovely, isn't it?" asked George.

"Beautiful," answered Prue.

"And I don't see," said George, "why we

shouldn't see-saw for always like this. I mean you and me together. It takes two, it does."

"I don't know."

"I do. I have fifteen shillings a week, we might see-saw on that. And I've got strong arms, and a good cottage, and a large garden. We might see-saw on that. And—I love you with all my heart."

"But is there to be see-saw in that?"

"None—fast as a nail. Will you?"

"Well, if it must be, it must."

That is how it came about.

The banns had been called and the marriage day had arrived. The parson was to be at the church at ten o'clock.

"Mother," said Prue the evening before. "There is my white confirmation gown and the veil the young ladies at the Hall gave me—I will wear that."

"And you must have flowers."

"Yes—white."

Now it so fell out that just before the time came for going to church Mrs. Worden exclaimed—

"Lor' a muss! The water be forgot. There ain't a drop in the house, and there'll be folk coming, and there must be tea for some, and, I reckon, gin and water for others, and there is all the washing up after, and, dear life, one can get along without bread, but never without water. Whatever shall I do?"

"I'll run to the well with the pitchers."

"But, Prue, you're in your white dress."

"I shall not stain it. It will not take me ten minutes."

"I'd go myself but for my leg as is so bad," said Mrs. Worden.

Then Prue caught up the pitchers and tripped away, past the old gnarled oak and the Conjuring Rock, down the path to the old quarry pit.

Never shall I forget what ensued.

There was a cluster of people about the church gate. These were friends ready to pelt with rice. The parson was in waiting. The bridegroom and his best man had arrived. Prue had been a favourite at the Hall, and the squire's daughters were there, all smiles, and they had brought with them a present which was to be put into Prue's hand as she went blushing like a June hedge-rose down the church avenue. And the ringers were all there, without their coats, in the tower, waiting and not oblivious of the fact that after a merry peal they would be called to the cottage to refresh themselves.

The party waited, then became impatient. Some ran along the road to see whether the bride were coming in sight. But all they saw was a child running. Presently the child came up breathless. "Please—Mrs. Worden says you're all to come—something has happened. She's in that state, she couldn't say all." Still no suspicion of real evil occurred. Some little misfortune perhaps.

"It's Prue. It's something to Prue," gasped the

child. Then the tidings ran like lightning through all assembled. The last to hear it was George Kennaway, who was in the church; but when he did hear he ran and outstripped them all.

He first reached the cottage. Mrs. Worden was then in a condition of terror and distress that almost bereft her of her senses.

"Prue—" she said, "went to the well—after water—my poor legs—I couldn't get down—but she went for the water—two pitchers. I—have—I—"

George Kennaway waited to hear no more. He ran down the steep descent, calling Prue. The answer came from the rocks, in a lower note, "Prue! Prue!" A jackdaw rushed out from the ivy.

Then he came to the well. She was not there, but he saw also at a glance why she was not there. During the preceding night a portion of the overhanging slate rock had fallen, not much, but just sufficient to crush in the top of the well, and render access to the water impossible without assistance from a crowbar.

The girl had consequently not been able to draw water where accustomed, and she had gone forward to the quarry pit. Here, as already said, the rock was slaty, inclined at a steep angle, and it was moist and slippery. She had stepped on to this, and had stooped, careful not to stain her white gown, with both pitchers in her hands, to dip for the water in the tarn, cold and crystal clear.

She had overbalanced, her feet had slipped on

the smooth sloping slate, and she had fallen in. And there—floating on the bottle-green water she was seen—like a dead white swan.

I feel that it is beyond my power with pen to describe what followed, the despair of the poor young man, the distraction of the mother, the sorrow of the whole parish. And never was there such a funeral in the memory of man as that of the bride, her white pall borne by six girls all in white, and wearing white posies—and a whole parish—every one from the richest to the poorest, from the red-faced, fox-hunting squire to the old stone-breaker with a crippled leg—in floods of tears.

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The other day I went over the ramp to look at the ruined cottage. Years had passed since this took place, which I have described. After the death of their only child, the Wordens had left the cottage and it had fallen into ruin. None else would take it, owing to the difficulty about the water, the distance it had to be drawn, and the tragedy connected with the well.

As I stood musing, looking at the crumbling walls—no flowers, no bees there now—I noticed a man of middle age come up the steep path from the well.

The quarry had of late been again in activity, and the rubbish was being shot to fill up the old workings, but as yet the very oldest pit, that where the well was, had not been invaded.

I turned to speak to the man. He seemed a stranger. At least I did not know him.

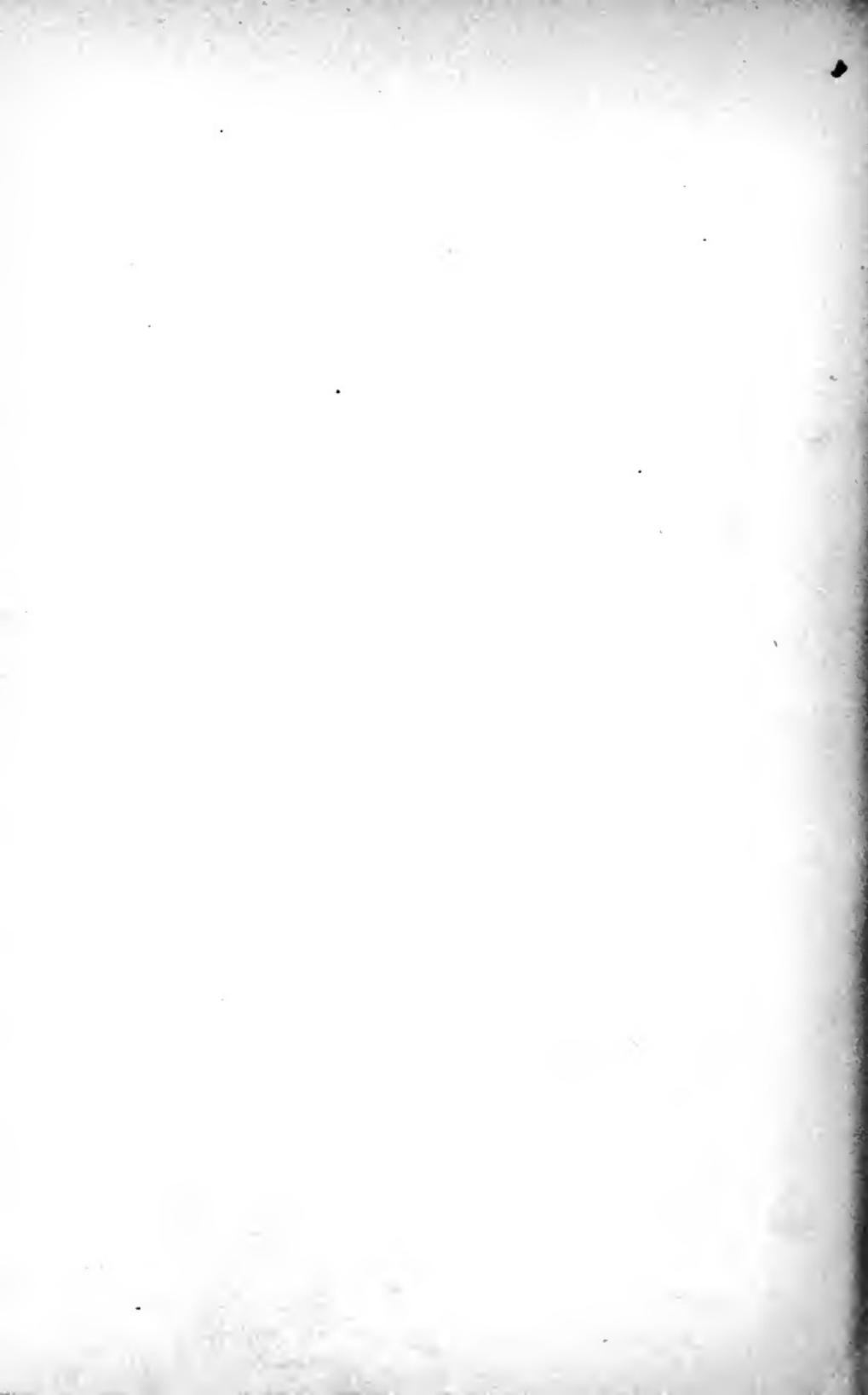
"A picturesque spot," said I, "to an artist quite a study."

"I am not an artist," he replied. "This spot is dear to me, inexpressibly dear through sad remembrances."

I looked closer at him.

"Yes," said he, "my name is George Kennaway. I—you know me now I see—well after *that* event I could not bear to be here; I went to Australia, and have done well there. I have come back now, after all these years—and— Well, sir, I have been to see the captain of the slate quarry, and I said to him: I will pay you almost what you like to ask, if you will spare the well and the old pit. Do not choke and bury them up—not whilst I live—for God's sake—I could not bear it. I saw—that white girl floating there—no—let it remain as it was. Ask what you will."

JACK HANNAFORD



JACK HANNAFORD

IN one of the dips among the hills of the red land stands a cobb cottage, thatched, and facing the sun. The red land consists of rich loam of the colour of what artists call Indian red, overlying sandstone of the same warm colour. It is a soil of the most remarkable fertility. You have but to stick into it a slip of any shrub, and it starts growing at once and does not desist till it is a tree ; sow in it any seed you like, and it springs up, and, like the corn in the Gospel, produces an hundredfold. For roses there is simply nothing in the round world equal to it. The grass that flourishes on it is the richest, most succulent, and the most emerald to be found and enjoyed anywhere. Indeed, the cows that consume the herbage on it have grown red as the soil itself, and if the sheep were not shorn annually they would produce fleeces of flame. Even the streams after rain run blood, so flush is this red land with the juices of life.

When a man wishes to build a house, he takes the clay, throws in straw, tramples it about for a while, and then builds it up into a wall ; it sets, and will out-endure a structure of stone, if only kept covered on top. And a house thus constructed, for

warmth, for cosiness, for healthiness, and for home comfort is simply not to be surpassed.

And, once again, on this red soil the cheeks of the girls and their kissable lips are a temptation to young men sheerly unavoidable.

The cottages on this red land and built of the red clay are low, with the windows of the "chambers," *i.e.* bedrooms, peering out of the thatch, that is, with the latter just lifted like a pretty eyebrow arched over them, looking coquettishly, with a soft languor in them at the passers-by in the lane.

In the lane!—and what lanes these are, deep cut in the red rock, overarched with sycamores, elms, oaks, the rich sides oozing with ripeness, scrambled over by countless creepers, occupied on every ledge by a thousand ferns, studded in March with constellations first of golden celandine, then of pale primroses, crested with dense blue hyacinths intertwinkled with crimson robin, and later towered over by a fringe of gorgeous, purple-belled foxglove, with twenty, thirty, even to fifty flowers on one rod.

In the midst of such beauty, such plenty, such softness, humanity cannot be rough and harsh. It is not so. The simplest peasant has the courtesy of a noble, and the lowliest girl the grace of a princess. In that warm, soft, crumbling soil hearts are also warm, soft, and—well, we must admit it—crumbling too.

Where Nature does so much for man, man is perhaps not greatly inclined to do much for him-

self; and this applies especially to his intellectual faculties. What compulsory education may do I cannot tell—it may change all this; but till of late years—allow it frankly—there was astounding ignorance in this favoured land. And with ignorance goes credulity.

Now I am going to tell of the inmates of one of these cobb cottages in the paradisaical land of New Redsandstone, in which also paradisaical ignorance was to be found.

This cottage, the face of which was white-washed and crept over with monthly roses, was occupied by Richard Redlake and his wife Julia.

They were both young people. He between thirty and forty, she half-way between twenty and thirty. Julia had been quite the prettiest girl in a village where not a girl lived who was not pretty. She had dark hair, and the softest, largest, most melting eyes, like rich agate, a complexion transparent, pure, with the sweetest rose-flush in it; and her figure was slender and willowy.

Julia could neither read nor write. Possibly because she could neither read nor write she was a most neat and knowing housewife, who kept her cottage in beautiful order, and whitened her hearth-stone and threshold every day, and even twice a day, and burnished pans and candlesticks and old mustard tins on the chimney shelf till they shone as gold and silver. Most labourers' wives possess the alchemical art of transforming soft, succulent meat over a fire into leather or indiarubber, and are

peculiarly skilful in destroying the digestions of their husbands. But Julia, perhaps because unable to read and write, turned out a bit of steak, or the meat in a pastry, or a stew, soft and delicious.

I say that this was due to ignorance of the two principal R's, because nowadays working-men's wives are too much taken up with penny dreadfuls and writing letters on parochial gossip to be able to spare the time for such menial work as keeping their houses neat, their own persons clean, and cooking meals with all their attention devoted to the task.

With these good qualities there was a drawback—ignorance, abysmal ignorance. Although Julia could not read, she believed in printed matter as something indisputable. What stood, as she termed it, "on the paper" was to be accepted as gospel.

For a couple of years after they were married, old Jack Hannaford, her father, lived with the young couple. And see—here is another odd thing. I am going to tell you about him after he was dead and buried.

Hannaford had been a queer old file, cantankerous, cute in his way, scheming, but doing nothing with his plans, because he neither had the means nor the vigour to carry them out. Julia had believed implicitly in him, and "Alack a jimminy!" said she, "vayther were a wun'nerful clever man; if he'd only not been crippled, and had had a penny wi' which he could speckerlate, he'd ha' been a gem'man by now."

Jack Hannaford had possessed a friend, a very knowing man named Eli Rattenbury, who lived about two miles off by himself. Eli had never been married. He did little jobs off and on for farmers, but was humorous, and at a word would leave his task and sulk and starve, rather than work for the man who had offended him. He was said to poach. He certainly gained a living by blessing wounds, "striking" tumours, and he possessed a "kenning stone," with which he touched and healed inflamed and sore eyes. He was held to be a bit of a rogue. He possessed unbounded influence over the ignorant peasantry, even over the farmers, who dreaded offending him; and it was shrewdly suspected that, although he had no regular vocation and occupation, he had amassed a tidy sum of money. Food did not cost him much, for he either, as was surmised, took a rabbit when he wanted one, or if he coveted a duck or a piece of pork, had only to ask for it, and no one dared deny him what he desired, lest ill luck should befall the denier.

Eli Rattenbury had a wonderful faculty for finding out when a pig had been killed anywhere in the district beyond earshot of its squeals, and so surely as a porker had been slain and was being scalded, he appeared on the scene, and did not leave without a portion of the pig.

Now it happened that the Redlakes had been fattening up one of these animals, but instead of killing it, they sold it. They had a supply of

bacon that would last them through the winter, and so did not require more for their personal consumption. Very soon after, when Richard was out at work, Eli Rattenbury appeared at the door, and without knocking came in.

"I don't smell the pig in the sty," said he.

"No; we'm rid us of him?"

"Killed? and not given me a spare-rib!"

"No, Eli; us sold 'n."

"You don't mean to say so! And what did he fetch?"

She told him, and added, "But, Eli, you shall have some nice salt bacon hanging yonder. We've sold our calf as well."

"You're lucky folk to be able to keep a cow."

"Well, we are; and we can always dispose of our butter."

"And you have fowls as well."

"Yes; and the regrader takes them also. I'll put you up some eggs in a basket."

Old Eli considered.

"I thought you might have sent 'em, wi'out my havin' to fetch 'em," was his ungracious comment.

"I am very sorry, Eli."

"You ort to be, considerin' your father and me was like brothers. By the way, I ha' had dreams—that is to say, visions—about *he* lately."

"No, never! I hope all is well with old vayther."

"Middlin'," responded Eli.

Julia stood still, and some of her colour went.

"I hope he's not gone——"

"Oh, no fear o' that. He's all right, so far. But you know, Julia, your poor vayther was never a church nor a chapel goin' man."

"'Cos o' his legs," explained Julia.

"Well, I don't say nothin' about the raysons, but you know so well as I do, he were not one as went to church or chapel."

"No," said the daughter.

"Well, then, how was he to find his way to where he 'ort to ha' gone to when he left this world of woe? As a fact, he lost his way and got into Americay by mistake."

"Well, now, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Redlake.

"Yes, true; he told me so," said Eli Rattenbury. "I don't see as you can expect any other. What'd be your situation, missus, if you was to get sudden-like out 'o the train, and be told to find your way to Golconda—or the Transvaal. You'd go wanderin' about, and ten to one find yourself in quite another place. 'Twas so wi' your poor father. Hobblin' on upon them there sticks, he came into the United States o' North Americay. Well, I seed 'n there in a vision. I thought I were carried there."

"You seed vayther?"

"For sure I did," answered Rattenbury.

"Well, Eli, do tell me what he said, and how he did look."

"'Go and tell Julia,' sez he, 'that I seez my way clear to realisin' a tremenjous fortune. I've talked it over with my Betsy.'"

"What—is mother there?"

"Certain; her wasn't neither church nor chapel goer, and her were just as lost as he about the road, and so got to Americay."

"Dear, now, to think it!"

"Well," said he, 'tell my Julia that I'm goin' to set up a bacon factory; I'm goin' to grow pigs, and mother'll salt'n—her does it beautiful.'"

"But where's the money to come from?" asked the astonished woman.

"That's it. 'Julia,' sez he, 'will lend me the money to start the pigs on.'"

"There's the money from the calf and the pig we sold," mused Julia, "but Richard has put it away quite safe."

"Where?"

"That I mayn't tell," she mused, and then said slowly, "I can't do it wi'out axin' Richard."

"Your vayther laid it on me that you was on no account to speak of it to he. 'Men,' sez he, 'have such tongues. Talk of women, they're nothing to men. When they gits together in a sunny hedge eatin' of their lunch—bless y', they talk of everything you can think on.'"

"I don't like to do it."

"He said—he will return it in double."

"How much does he want?"

"Say ten pounds, just to make a start."

"And in a week—"

"You'll have twenty, and Richard no wiser."

"And how is that ten pounds to go to dear old vayther? "

Eli Rattenbury hesitated, bethought himself, then said, "Jack Hannaford said as how you should have the money doubled. And he advised that you should take the ten pounds, wrapped up in rag and put in an old sardine tin, or an old jam pot, and if you takes my advice you will bury it under the headstone near the middle, no one observin' you, four inches below the turf. And you was not to go and look at it for a week, but if you did so and found it gone, then don't wonder at it, Jack Hannaford has took it and has laid it out in pigs. But you may look for it in a week, or better still a month, and sure as eggs be eggs, you'll find there twenty pounds in gold."

"Are you to go with me?"

"No. You do it yourself; folks might observe and wonder if they seed me wi' you at the grave, but if you go, that's nothin', they'll think you've gone to weed it, or put flowers."

"Well, I will do it," said Julia.

"When?"

"To-day."

"And mind, not a word to Richard."

Then, precipitately, Eli Rattenbury departed, and about an hour later, from a secret place in the thatching, Julia drew some money, counted out ten sovereigns, wrapped them in rag, put them in a little pot, and hurried to the churchyard and buried the store exactly at the place she had been told by the old rogue to place it. Then she fled home.

Had she remained in hiding, and watched, she would have seen Rattenbury creep out from behind the church porch, go to the grave of Jack Hannaford, dig up the money and pocket it.

That same evening, on Richard Redlake's return, he clapped his wife on the back, and said "Julia! news. I've arranged to take another field; and I'm going to buy another cow. I've seen her, half Jersey; ours runs dry at times, and we can't supply our customers reg'lar as they likes. If we have two, why, then one will be yieldin' whilst t'other's dry. She'll cost twenty-five pound, and I've bought her. I shall pay to-morrow. We have the money in the thatch."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! If Dick looked at the hoard he would discover that it was diminished. So Julia made the best of a bad business, and told him all.

"In a month when old vayther has turned it over, you'll have it doubled," said she.

"You are a fool! That old rascal has befooled you," said her husband. He was very angry, but scolding would not bring back the money. He strode to the churchyard and of course found the gold gone. The jam pot was there—not its contents. What should Richard do? If he went to Rattenbury, the rogue would brazen it out. He had not been to the churchyard, he would protest. Let his pockets be turned out, his house searched, the money was not with him. If any one had taken the gold it must have been some one who

had watched Julia surreptitiously, as she concealed it. No! there was nothing to be got that way. However, instead of returning home, Dick marched off to the cottage inhabited by Eli. The old fellow was there, and seemed alarmed as young Redlake came up.

"How do?" said Richard.

"Very well, I thank y'," answered Eli in a restrained voice, and looked from side to side, as though for a place of escape.

"Julia has told me all," said the young man, "and I always did think Jack Hannaford was a wun'nerful schemin' man. That there is a clever idea of his. I'm sure he'll succeed."

Old Rattenbury breathed freely.

"Sure—cock sure," said he.

"Now, look here, Eli," continued Dick; "I ask your advice. I've saved a bit o' money—in all some twenty-five pounds—a little more or less. Now, that wi' the ten pound Julia has lent to the old gem'man makes thirty-five, and if it be doubled, as you say, it will be forty-five. Now, if I'd a matter of about a hundred pound, I'd take Yatton Farm, and would stock it; it ain't a terrible big place, and I could manage it. What say you? would old Jack Hannaford double the twenty-five as well as the ten?"

"Sure he would."

"Then I'll risk it, and yet I'd like to be sure first. I think I'll see if he doubles Julia's loan. If he do that, then I'll trust him in the same way with

the rest—twenty-five. But you say I must wait a month."

"Oh dear no, two days suffice. Pigs fatten, as dandelions blow, all of a night in Americay."

"Well, I can but try."

"Don't go to the grave till Thursday, and we'll be there together. We'll see; maybe the money may then be doubled, maybe it won't."

"Very well, Thursday; I'd be afraid to go alone."

On the following Thursday Eli Rattenbury appeared at the cottage door; Richard Redlake was awaiting him.

"Look here," said he, pouring out a sack of gold on the table, "twenty-five sovereigns. Won't somebody be pleased?"

"I believe you," said Eli, "let's make haste."

So the two men went to the churchyard. No one was about—no one observed them.

"I don't know where Julia put the money," said Rattenbury.

"But I do," said Dick. "Here in the middle, and sure enough, here is a jam pot, and something in it, on my word! Money—gold—Eli. Well, now, they do turn cash over up there pretty smart. How much is it? Twenty sovereigns, as I'm a man. By George, Eli, all this mine?"

"Certainly, it is the interest on the loan."

"But for three days!"

"They're wun'nerful generous over yonder, to Americay."

"And I can take it in all honest conscience?"

"To be sure you may. If not yours, whose is it?"

"Then, Eli Rattenbury, I don't think I'll put any more out to interest. I've done so well with this that I'll bide content."

And Richard put the twenty sovereigns in with the twenty-five. Then he looked up into Rattenbury's face.

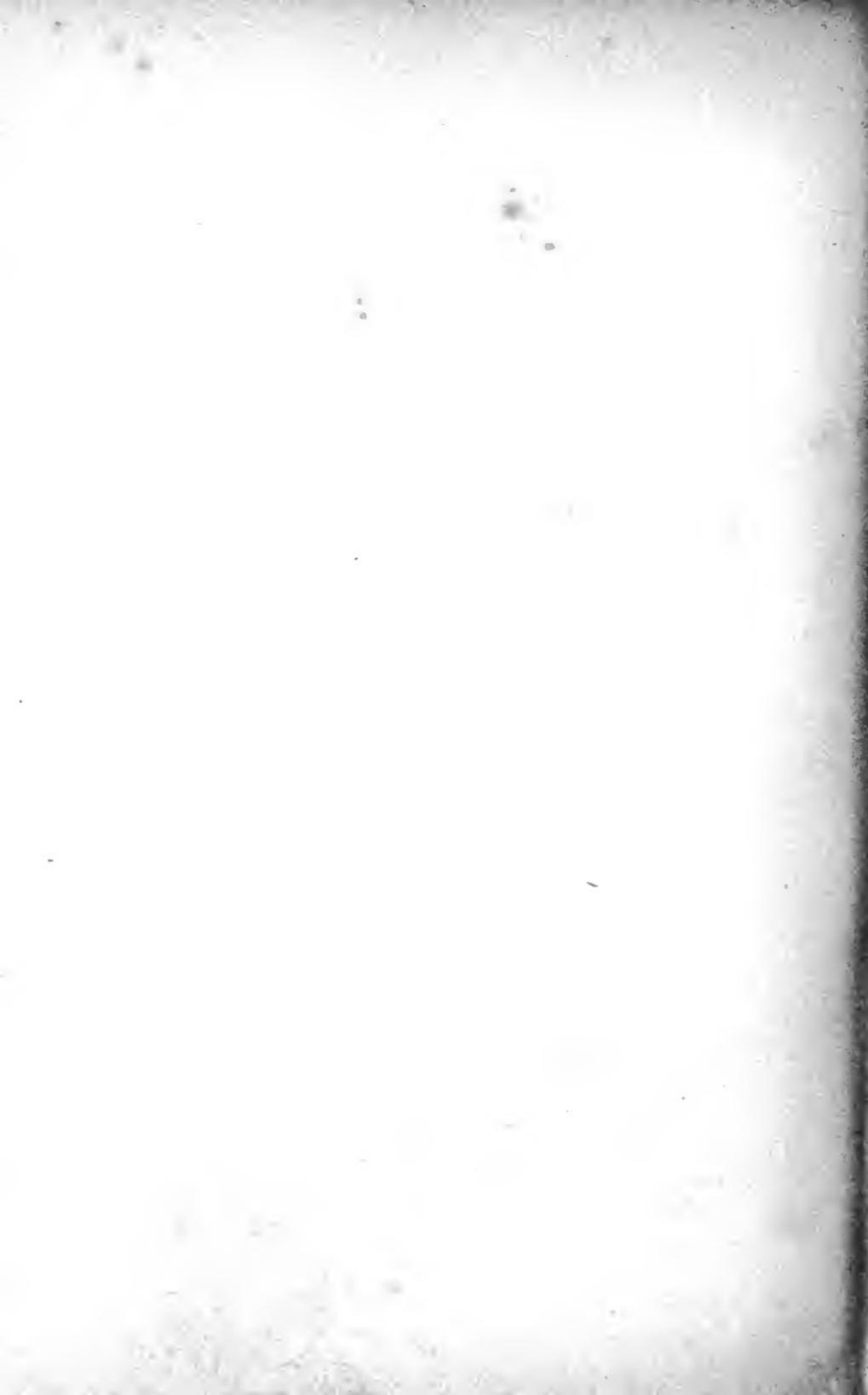
"What's the matter, man? got a stomach ache?"

"I ain't well, I'll go home. Don't y' think now 'twould be fitty to share with me?"

"Not at all, Eli; the loan was mine. The interest accordin' is mine. Suppose you now go and put a little money under the turf and see if Jack Hannaford will treat you in the same way? You don't look comfortable as I likes to see you, Eli; go home and sleep and dream again."



FROM DEATH TO LIFE



FROM DEATH TO LIFE

THE alteration of parochial boundaries by Act of Parliament has done away with some curious anomalies that had survived from the first formation of parishes in England—that is to say, done away with them so far as rating is concerned, but not ecclesiastically.

The anomalies to which I refer are the odd, outlying patches, like islets, belonging to one parish, and yet surrounded by others. There are counties in England that have their insulated portions; and the same is very general with regard to parishes. How this came about is not difficult to discover. It was due to the ancient holders of estates, who liked to have their properties united ecclesiastically. There was such a detached patch of parish at Sugden. It was three miles from the parish church; it was encompassed on all sides by the parish of Walmoden; but as the story I am going to tell relates to the time before the rectification of parochial boundaries, the cottagers of this islet were rated as Sugdenian, and for all matters ecclesiastical looked to Sugden as their parish church. If they wished to be married, their banns were called at Sugden; if they were to be buried,

double fees were demanded at Walmoden, and, as the cotters were very poor, they went to lay the dust of their kinsfolk at Sugden. Indeed, unless they had been very poor, they would not have lived at Woodman's Well, as the islet was called, for it was away from the high-road, it was distant from neighbours, it consisted of a hamlet containing two houses and a half.

The half-house was a whole cottage whose roof had fallen in, leaving, however, one end partially covered, in which an old woman, who gathered herbs, told fortunes, and charmed white swellings, kept up a precarious existence under a tottering chimney. She was not alone; she had a daughter. The two cottages were in partial collapse; their thatch was mouldy, rotten, but not broken through, and the wooden casements were decayed, but not in pieces. If the present tenants were to vacate these houses, their owner believed that he would not be able to find others who would take them and give rent for them. They had been erected on lives, and it was probable that when they fell in to the landlord, they would fall in altogether. By law, of course, he could insist on the holder of the property keeping them in repair; but then, precisely, this holder was an old man living a hundred miles away, and was impecunious; consequently his legal right was as good as no right at all.

Those who occupied the cottages were: in the first, a mason and his wife; that is to say, the mason was the tenant in the eye of the law, but

his occupancy was casual, and his wife saw but little of him. She was a weakly woman, with one child, a frail little creature of two years, a lovely child with fair hair and blue eyes. The father was fond, very fond of his little Rosie; but he was fonder of good company at the public-house.

In the second house lived a widow, with her son, Jack Weldon; a fine, strapping lad, with an open face, honest brown eyes always on the twinkle, and a flexible mouth that was ever on the quiver with a laugh. His was an irresistible face. You could not look at it without a smile. There was in it nothing grotesque, certainly nothing deformed, but it was inexpressibly comical. The eyes, the mouth, and an upright jet of hair, like the crown of a cockatoo, were mirth-provoking. Jack was infinitely good-natured, very kind to his mother, and a favourite in the hamlet—that is to say, with his neighbours, the mason's wife and the white-witch. Owing to the temptation of living surrounded by woods and downs, where rabbits multiplied, he was a bit of a poacher, and he kept the two houses and a half supplied with rabbit-meat. Ostensibly and actually he was a ploughboy. His sporting was done at night and on Sundays.

His good-humour, his drollery, would have made Jack a popular man at the public-house; but happily, his tenderness to his mother and his love of sport drew him home when the day's work was over, and he preferred laying snares in the wood to sitting boozing at the table in the tavern.

Thomas Leveridge was the mason. He was a man good at heart, but weak—weak as water—fond of politics and of argument. Election-time was thought to be not far distant; Thomas had not been home for a fortnight. It is true his work was at a distance of ten miles, and he walked to it on Mondays and returned on Saturdays. But of late he had not been home even for the Sundays; because—well, it was a long trudge, and because—well, his wife was cranky, and because—well, the child had been fretting and crying all night, and he had not enjoyed a good sleep when he was at home.

Thomas Leveridge loved his wife, and he loved his babe, loved his home, but he loved politics better, loved his pleasure better, loved himself most of all.

Now, unhappily, there was a serious and far-reaching reason why the child had fretted and cried. It was sickening for scarlet fever. This he did not suppose was the case. "Children alway be squealin' when they teeths," he said. "They sleeps by day and 'owls o' nights. 'Tis their natur'. But to me as has to work, it's discompoging."

So Thomas Leveridge departed with his bundle on the Monday morning, whistling, went to his work, heard that a dissolution was in the air, was neglectful of his work, got dismissed, went about canvassing throughout the district, and did not receive the letter which had been sent to tell him that his child was dangerously ill. No, nor the

second letter to inform him that little Rosie was dead; no, nor the third letter to entreat him to return for the funeral.

What Mrs. Leveridge would have done without the assistance of her neighbours I cannot say. Little Rosie had been her mother's one joy, one solicitude, one ambition. Neglected by her husband, in a dilapidated house, delicate in health, and weak of body, the poor woman had but one sunbeam to enlighten her life; and that sunbeam was her child, and that light was now darkness.

She was wholly overcome, broken-hearted, despairing. Jack Weldon's mother came to the aid of the unhappy woman, and saw to everything, and strove to comfort her. Jack ran to announce the death to the relieving officer, ordered the coffin of the carpenter at Sugden, and arranged with the sexton about the grave. He did more: he went to the town where Thomas Leveridge worked, in hopes of finding him; but could learn only that he had been dismissed by his master, and was all over the country drinking and canvassing. Unable to trace him, he had to return to Woodman's Well.

At this very time Kate Westlake, the white-witch's daughter appeared, a brown-faced, bright-eyed, pleasant girl, for whom there was not accommodation in the collapsed cottage. She had been in service in a farm; but owing to bad times the farmer had thrown up his tenement, and she had been obliged to leave and look out for a new situation. Meanwhile she came home and found

the house she had left practically roofless. Difficulties settle themselves somehow, and this difficulty among others; and this is the way in which it settled itself. Kate went into the cottage of the Leveridges. Mrs. Leveridge needed to have some one with her by night as well as by day, and was very glad to accept the attention and help of the good-natured young girl. Mrs. Weldon could not be always with her; and not only were preparations to be made for the funeral, but also the poor woman's health and spirits were so shaken that the ordinary household duties were beyond her powers.

The day of the funeral arrived. Little Rosie was placed in her coffin of plain deal. She had been so small, had become so light through sickness, that the coffin was no weight to speak of. The poor mother was without means, the father was nowhere to be found; he was in no club—that is to say, in no benefit club. He was a member of three political clubs, that brought in no benefit at all, but entailed payments. The funeral must be carried out in the most economical manner. Of neighbours there were only the inmates of Woodman's Well. Owing to the insulated position of this cluster, the population of the circumfluent parish of Walmoden did not regard itself as responsible for sympathy. At a child's funeral it was not etiquette for ardent spirits to be provided; consequently the funeral arrangements were of the most meagre description, and the number of sym-

pathisers few. Jack was to tuck the little coffin under his arm and carry it to Sugden churchyard, and of mourners there would be but Mrs. Weldon and Kate Westlake. The old witch undertook during their absence to keep company with the bereaved mother, who had not the strength to follow the corpse three miles to its last resting-place.

On the way another woman would fall in, who lived in an old octagonal, abandoned toll-gate, and had a passion for funerals, and went to every interment, whoever it might be that was buried, an acquaintance or a stranger.

The day was lovely. Wood-doves cooed in the coppice, and blackbirds fluted; in the blue sky compact white clouds drifted like icebergs in a still ocean. Jack Weldon had done his best to assume a mourner's appearance: he had put on a black round cap with crape about it, a black coat, but could not muster other than brown continuations. His mother had hunted up his father's Sunday pair; but his father had been a short and stout man. These would not fit the length of Jack's legs, and about the waist would have been double, like a Jaeger jersey.

"We must do what we can," said the widow; "nobody expects us to do more. I'll stitch a black crape band round the leg above the knee. Gentle-folks does it on the arm."

By this method the snuff-coloured continuations of Jack were given a suitably lugubrious ex-

pression. If they were not black, they tried to look funereal.

"After all," said Mrs. Weldon, "you don't expect for babies what you do for grown-ups."

So the procession started, and augmented itself on the way by the contingent from the toll-gate.

The woman from the latter was of an age agreeable with that of Mrs. Weldon. The way was long. It comported with the occasion to move slowly.

That two old women, both naturally prone to gossip, should walk all the way in silence, was not to be expected; and they were soon in full flow of conversation, carried on in an undertone.

But if it was impossible for two old women to walk three miles in silence, so was it impossible for two young people to do so.

Jack ought to have led the way, followed by Kate; but Jack was burdened, and lagged accordingly, and Kate had an impulsive spirit, and therefore forged ahead.

"I say, Jack," said Kate, "be Rosie terrible heavy?"

"Weighs no more than a feather," answered he. "Poor mite, she wasted away to nothing at all."

"I asked because I thought you seemed tired."

"I tired?"

"Well, you look hot."

"Hot I be—it is the weather. I'm perspiring wonderful, and can't get at my pocket-handkerchief—it is in the pocket next the coffin."

"If you don't mind, I'll wipe your face," said the girl. "But you must stand still and stoop."

Jack halted, bowed, and Kate passed her white cambric pocket-handkerchief over his face.

"Thank y'," said the bearer. "It's terrible refreshing, and smells beautiful."

"That's scent I put on it," explained the girl.

Meanwhile the old women were in lively converse. The black strip round Jack's leg had started them; they diverged to the scandal of Thomas Leveridge being away when his child died, and not being present at the funeral.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mrs. Weldon, "men are monsters. They've no more feelings than have traction engines. I wish we could get along without them."

"But Jack?"

"Ah! Jack is a good son. I'm not speaking of lads, but of married men. There is poor Mrs. Leveridge, left without a shilling; and whatever she would have done had not Jack caught her a rabbit, I do not know. It all comes of politics."

"You're right there," said the woman from the toll-gate; "when they get politics into their heads, it's worse than beer. They can get the better of liquor with a good sleep, but of politics"—she shook her head and sighed. "I'll tell y' what it is," continued Mrs. Weldon. "It's our own faults that the men get that rampageous. We give in to them too much. My husband never went after ale or

politics ; but then I taught him his duty from the beginning."

"That's it—it all comes of beginning well," said the toll-gate mourner. "It's the same with dogs and with poultry. Lor' bless you, if I didn't take the stick to my cochin-china, he'd be all over the kitchen."

"I'd never advise any girl to marry," said Mrs. Weldon.

"Nor I neither," was the reply ; "it's a pity they won't take advice—they are that wilful."

Both couples were interrupted in their respective conversations by a rattle of wheels, shouts, a waving of colours, and up came a light cart occupied by a couple of men, one driving, both vociferating, one brandishing a whip, the other waving a parti-coloured sheet attached to a stick. The cart was drawn by a donkey with coloured rosettes, and was urged forward by the whip, at the end of which was a favour, accentuated with a bunch of thorns. The donkey, stung by the thorns, frightened by the yells, was galloping, and the banner was streaming in the air.

"Hurrah ! Vote for Popjoy !" yelled the man with the flag as he flourished it over his head, and, swinging round the corner, the donkey came almost against the bearer with the coffin, and swerved so suddenly that the banner-bearer lost his balance, and was precipitated from the cart into the road, and fell at the feet of Jack Weldon.

"What are you doing there ?" shouted the fallen

man. "I'll have a law passed to get the likes of you transported for life!"

He tried to rise, but found that he could not, and began to swear.

Then Mrs. Weldon pushed forward.

"Thomas!" she cried, in a voice harsh with indignation, "do you know where you be? and to whom you speak, you ill-conditioned tadpole?"

"I know well enough. I'm on the road—and I've hurt my leg somehow."

"Do you know what you be?" again exclaimed Mrs. Weldon.

"I should think I did. I'm a free and enlightened elector."

"Look up, Thomas Leveridge, from where you lie, stopping your little Rosie on the way to her grave."

"Ah!" threw in the woman from the toll-gate, "if you, her own father, won't come home to see your own sick and dying child, we, who're no relations, must bury her without consideration of you."

Then up came the companion of the prostrate man, who by this time had mastered the ass.

"I say, Thomas Leveridge! what's to be done?" he asked.

The man on the road did not answer at once; he looked with glazed eyes and quivering mouth at the little chest. He tried to speak, but he could not. He tried to raise himself, but was powerless.

"Shall we get you into the cart?" asked his comrade.

"Ay," answered Leveridge; "take me home. I can't go nowhere else. Poor Marianne!"

Some hours later the little funeral party returned to Woodman's Well, without the deal chest, walking at an accelerated pace—or rather, let me say that the old women walked fast; the young mourners lagged. Eventually they got home, and Jack entered the cottage of the Leveridges. Without a word he ascended the rickety staircase. It was strewn with scraps of coloured paper, on which were stray letters of the exhortation, "Vote for Popjoy!"

He might have been following a paper-chase; for at intervals along the road, down the lane, these coloured scraps had shown the way to the cottage. They had fallen from the hand of the injured man as he had been conveyed home, and on his way had torn the posters, and strewn them.

On the bed in the upper chamber lay Thomas Leveridge. A surgeon had already been there, and had pronounced the hip dislocated and a bone broken. He had replaced the joint and had spliced the bone. Leveridge was condemned to occupy his bed for some weeks. Beside him sat his wife, with red eyes and pale cheeks; on the floor was a cradle, empty; and she, inadvertently, was rocking it with her foot. Her heart was too full for words.

Jack looked at the man. Leveridge had turned his face to the wall, and was breathing hard; and at intervals a convulsive movement interrupted his

long-drawn inspirations. He put up his hand to lay hold of the coverlet and draw it over his shoulder, and it shook—he could catch hold of nothing.

Jack did not speak. He thought: Let him cry, it will do him good. Tears will wash out his fault; and a fault it was in him to neglect home, even for his political party. Home claims first duties, then come others. If we begin the other way on, we are setting a steeple weathercock downwards, and laying the foundations in the clouds.

Presently Leveridge turned his face round, but would not let the light shine on his eyes; therefore he moved it on the pillow to where it was crossed by the shadow of his wife. Then he sighed and said, "Such a child as was my Rosie! There is no angel in heaven like her. Dear me! I was all for patching of the Constitution, and never mended up my own house. I am a mason, and did not put a bit of plaster to that crack in the wall; and the wind blew in on my little Rosie, and the draught killed her. I'm sure if I were dying——"

"You are not dying," said his wife; "you are only laid by for a bit."

"Ay," said Thomas, "I'm tied to home by my leg, and serve me right; and now I can't go to the poll." He began to kick about.

"You must not do that," said Mrs. Leveridge. "The doctor said you were to lie still."

"I can't help it, Marianne," said the mason. "I'm real hearty glad I can't go to the poll. It

just serves me right, and touches me where I'm most tender. When I think of what I have done in leaving you alone, and my Rosie ill, I feel that ashamed as I'd like to dive under the bedclothes and never come up no more. Now look here, Jack. You are not a married man, nor thinking of it."

"No," said Jack, retreating a step; "I'm rather too young, thank you kindly."

"No offence, it was well meant," said the mason. "What I was going to say to you— But there, I hear your name called below. Run and see who wants you."

The young man descended the stairs. At the foot stood Kate with a newspaper in her hand.

"Were you calling me?" asked Jack.

"I wanted to know if you'd be so very good as to go over the advertisements with me," said Kate timidly. "I am a poor scholar; and I want to know if there is something in the paper that might suit me."

"I'll do it," said Jack. He took the newspaper and spread it out on the kitchen table under the latticed window. "Let's see—what do you want?"

"Go right through, if you please."

"Messrs. Hampton will sell by auction this day that desirable——"

"No, Jack, I'm not going to stand that."

"Tenders are invited for new offices."

"That's hardly in my way."

"Three thousand gentlemen's cast-off suits, over-coats, boots——"

"No, I shouldn't know what to do with them all."

"Electrical engineering. A vacancy for an articled pupil."

Kate hesitated. "I don't quite understand. I can feed pigs, bake, and milk. Is it anything to do with that?"

"No; as far as I can make out, it has to do with electioneering."

"Then I'll have nothing to say to it. Go on to the next."

"'Bake,' you said. Then here goes. 'Wanted at once, a man well up in smalls. State salary.'"

"But I'm not a man. Is there nothing that will suit me?"

"Here is something new," said Jack, and he began to laugh. "'Matrimony.—Bachelor, tall, handsome, healthy, good social position, possessing gold mines, and £2000 per annum, wishes to meet with a lady with view to marriage. Send full particulars. State age. Send photo. Thoroughly genuine.'"

"That's the situation for me, to a hair! Do answer, Jack. I'm twenty-one."

"But the photo?"

"I have none."

"Then what is the good of answering? There will be such a run on this gentleman."

"You think so, Jack?"

"Sure of it."

"But not such desirable females as me."

"There's no photo," said the young man sternly.

"But I can get myself photygraphed."

"And by that time he will be caught up."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it."

"It is very hard to find a place."

"I don't quite know what you want. Here are a pair of roller-skates advertised, and here is a light phaeton."

"No," said Kate decidedly. "That's not matrimonial, and it's matrimonial I like: read another."

"There is no other."

"Then read over the first again."

Jack did so. Kate mused.

"Look here, Jack," said she. "Write for me and give a good description; and say I'll be photygraphed the first opportunity."

"That's no good—he'll think you colour yourself too high."

"But if *you* describe me, Jack."

"Well—here goes. Bright eyes, rosy cheeks, with a little dimple just at the corner of the mouth, and dark hair that shines, and lips—" Jack threw down the paper on the floor, put his foot on it, and burst forth with, "Drat it! If it's matrimonial you want, come along with me back to Sugden to the parson, and we'll ask him to read the banns next Sunday. But perhaps you're too tired?"

"I—I tired? Bless you, I could run all the way."

After a few weeks Thomas Leveridge was able to get about; and though he could not go at once

to a distance for work, he was able to do small jobs near home. The squire came to Woodman's Well. Complaints had been made by the sanitary officer that the cottages were ruinous and unhealthy.

"I'll tell you what," said he to Leveridge, "I will have them put into thorough repair and send the bill to old Rumage, who's got the life-rights. If he won't pay, then the cottages are mine."

"And may I do them up?"

"Most assuredly."

"That is famous," said the mason; "then I shall have time to whitewash and make sweet before the wedding."

"Wedding? What wedding? I thought there had been a burial—that the place was insanitary, and that—"

"Well, sir, out of Death cometh Life. A funeral sometimes leads to a marriage."

A year and a day had passed since this conversation; then there issued from two houses at Woodman's Well two little parties on their way to the parish church.

But this time no little coffin was carried to the graveyard; on the contrary, two lusty little infants were being conveyed to the baptismal font; and the parties issued respectively from the cottage of the Leveridges and from that of the Weldons. And as both parties arrived at the toll-gate, the woman who inhabited the toll-house issued forth, to act as sponsor to both babes.

And as she walked along she said to old Mrs. Weldon, "Who ever would have thought it, last time us two went this way?"

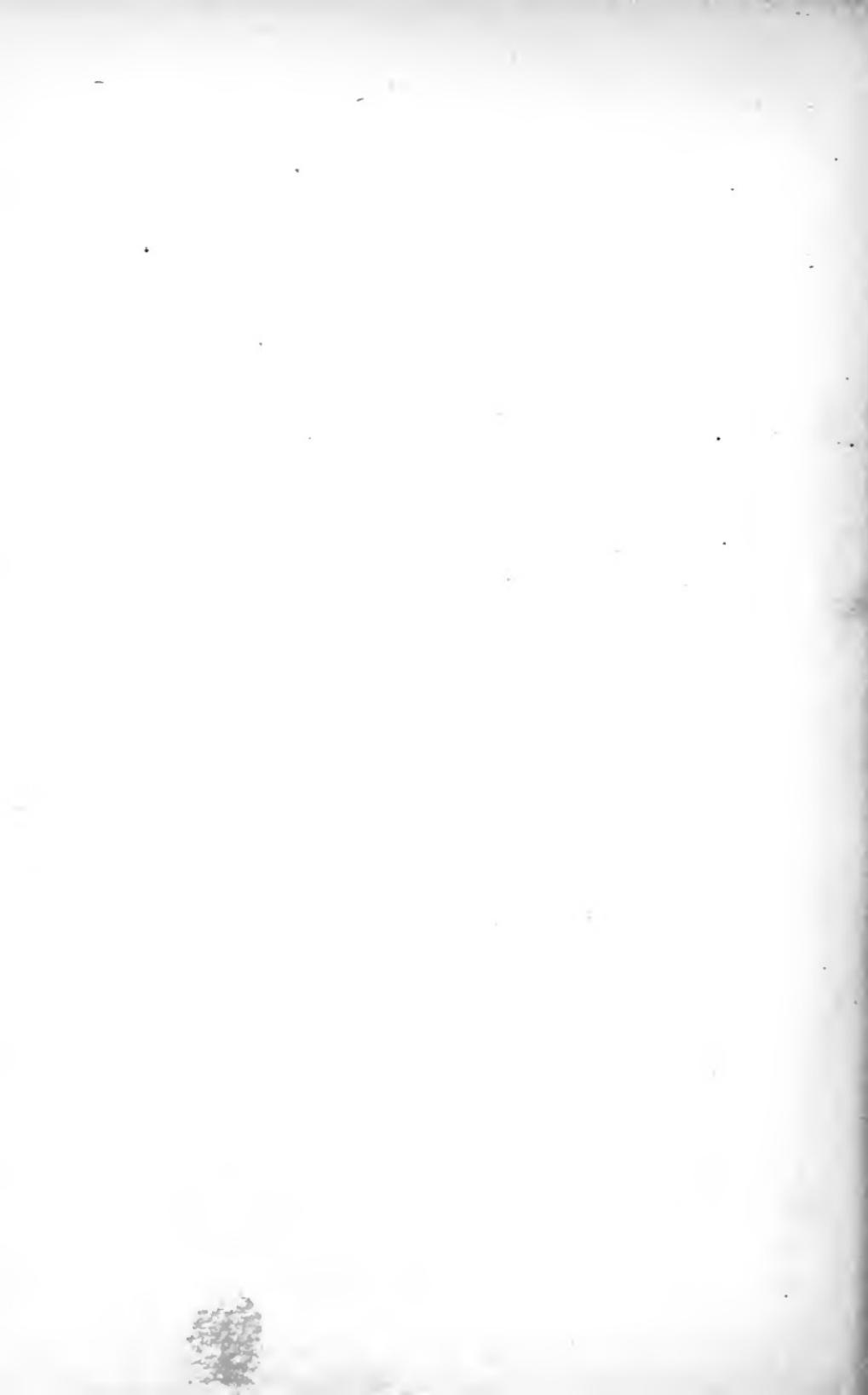
"Who ever would?" answered Mrs. Weldon; "but Jack might have gone far and fared worse."

"And then—Thomas Leveridge?"

"He's taken to caring for home first, and politics come second only."

"Well, well! The last time we were here together it was to a burying; but it is true, that sayin' of Scriptur', 'From Death we have passed to Life.'"

CICELY CROWE



CICELY CROWE

I

OUR house is a long one; it takes two minutes to walk from one end to the other, consequently by the time one has gone from the principal staircase at the east extremity to the kitchen at the west, one is older by two minutes; whether one has grown in the time I am unable to say, never having taken measures before starting and on arriving. It is satisfactory that the staircase and not the dining-room occupies the extreme east, otherwise we should always partake of cold meals.

But as if the main block of the house were not, in all conscience, long enough, at some unknown period since its first construction a back kitchen was added beyond the kitchen, farther west, and then, a little room only reached by a stair farther west still. This little "prophet's chamber" was, however, one used within my recollection for the keeping of the feathers of geese and fowls that had been plucked, where they accumulated till sufficient for the composition of a feather bed, when they were picked, cleaned, baked, and made up.

Before this final process I well remember, as a

child of eight or nine, scrambling into this little chamber, and then rolling and dancing among the feathers, and making, as I believed, a snowstorm about me. The after effects were not conducive to comfort; and I remember that the process of scrubbing and cleansing me and my clothes after this snowstorm was both irksome and lengthy. That experience was never repeated, not only because of the cleansing process, but also because I was put across my father's knee, and the lesson not to play with feathers and raise snowstorms was impressed on me with a square ruler, till my father got hot in the face, and I—hot, elsewhere.

The same little stair that conducted to the feather room, also gave admission to a low garret above the back kitchen.

This garret contained all kinds of imaginable and unimaginable lumber.

My dear father, who was an enthusiast for novelties, bought every possible invention that conduced to the saving of time by cooks—patent egg-boilers, lemon-squeezers, apple-parers, digesting pots, &c. These the cooks “chucked” up into the lumber place with mighty disdain, and went on in their old ways. Moreover, into it went all the pans that they had left unscoured till rust had eaten through them, all the kettles that began to leak, by letting them fall on the stone floor; a coffee roaster that the then reigning cook refused to use, because it was less trouble to employ ready-roasted coffee; a mortar, the bottom of which had

been knocked out, because she would pound almonds in it on her lap instead of on the table; a tobacco canister in which bird's-eye was kept for a lover when he came on a visit. In fact, this garret was an emporium of objects illustrative of kitchen wastefulness, and indicative of my father's good-nature.

No one ever visited this garret except the cook when "chucking away" some of "master's new-fangled nonsense," or when putting away some damaged article out of reach of her mistress's eye, consequently it was wholly given over to rats, that raced about in it with a boldness only equalled by that of cook when she looked straight into my mother's eyes and said there never had been, so long as she had been in the house, one of these articles my mother missed, as the coffee-roaster, or the china mortar, or the stewing pan, or the bronchitis kettle; or when my father sent inquiries about such articles as the lemon-squeezer, or the apple-parer, or the cream-whipper.

The rats got their pickings in this garret: they licked out the dirty frying-pans in which was grease, they consumed the contents of the pie-dishes that had been burnt in the oven with crust adhering to them, and nibbled at the rabbit-skins that had been put away there to be sold to the rag-and-bone man when he came round.

I knew of this garret, and loved it, loved it almost as dearly as did the rats. My mother and father did not like my visiting it, as I came away

from it very dirty in hands and face, and with clothing often torn by nails ; and cook never would endure that I should visit it for reasons of her own. Consequently, visits to it were surreptitious, and made at rare intervals.

We had, when I was about thirteen, a maid of the name of Cicely Crowe ; she was an excellent servant, with a passionate love of neatness, did her work well and conscientiously, but had not the most amiable disposition or the most gracious manner. She was not a bad-tempered woman, never violent, but, just as a diamond is said to be off colour if the least lacking in absolute clearness, so may she be said to have been off temper. She was very kind-hearted, but it seemed to go against her pride to do a kind thing in a kind way. She never saw the good in anything, only the faults. We all liked Cicely, but we all wished she would try to be more pleasing. However, we have each our blurs in this world, one in one way, one in another, and had Cicely's mood been sunny, and her manner sparkling, why she would have been snapped up at once, and half the young men in the village would have been quarrelling as to who should have her. It was just this uncertainty in her temper which deterred them, and kept her in our service so many years.

She was a very pretty girl, was Cicely, with brown hair, so neat that never was a hair out of place, and with large hazel eyes, and such a complexion !—cream and strawberry were nothing to

it, and the colour palpitated under her transparent skin like the flush of the evening sun on far-off delicate clouds.

The lads of the village said to each other, "What a lass that Cicely is, but—" And our friends said to my mother, "What a very nice, respectable servant girl you have in Cicely." "Oh dear, yes," answered my mother, "she is everything that could be desired, but—" And her fellow-servants all said, "We have nothing to say against Cicely, but—" And we children remarked to each other, "Cicely is tremendously nice, but—" No one ever got any further than "but—," for no one could bring it over the lips to say a word in depreciation of Cicely.

Now it fell out all on a summer's day that cook had gone off for a holiday, and the kitchenmaid had sickened with measles and been sent home, and with great trepidation, and with a tremulous voice, and an appeal in her eyes, my mother had asked Cicely if she *would*, under the circumstances, boil the potatoes and the greens for the early dinner on that Sunday. There was nothing to roast, nothing to stew; cook had made cold pies and shapes, and so on, to last till her return.

Cicely replied ungraciously that everything was put on her, but she supposed she must do it, and then turned her back on my mother and went off to change her gown. As I have said, it was Sunday. I had a sore throat, and so was not allowed to go to church, and was bidden remain

at home, not go outside the doors, and keep myself warm.

Now I had calculated on this, and had borrowed a rat-trap from the gardener, and when Cicely was upstairs putting on such garments as she deemed suitable for peeling potatoes and shelling peas, and cooking them, I slipped up the stairs into the garret, hugging the trap, and holding a piece of cheese-rind I had surreptitiously seized on and had roasted over my candle. I was resolved on spending the time whilst my parents were at church in catching a rat. There was a loose slate in the roof and I tilted this up, peeped out, and watched my father and mother, brothers and sisters, and the governess stalk away from the front door in their Sunday suits, with prayer-books under their arms, and I saw my dear mother pick off sundry bits of "fluff," ends of thread, &c., which her eye detected on the children's clothes.

Then I heard a bustle of feet underneath, and some tongues, and I knew that the domestics were also off to church by the back door. Thereupon I set my trap, and sat down behind a barrel in the corner waiting to hear the rats come out, and to watch them snuff at, then bite the bait, and, snap—be caught.

Whilst I waited, and, waiting, learned my collect which had been set me as a task, I heard Cicely come into the back kitchen, and with a sharp motion pull the pan to her in which were the potatoes she had to peel.

Almost immediately after I heard the kitchen door open, and a male voice exclaim, "Well, Cicely, so here you are?"

"I s'pose I be," was her answer.

Now the floor of the loft was of boards, and in these boards were knots, and the centre of some of these had fallen out. The back kitchen was not ceiled. One of these peep-holes was close to me, so very gently I lay down flat on the floor and applied my eye to the hole, and then saw that a young man had entered named Will Swan.

I knew him well. He had a boat, and was a fisherman; an honest, cheerful fellow, with whom I often went out on the sea. He was uncommonly civil, and would insist on carrying the fish I caught, or fancied I had caught, home for me.

Now only did it dawn on my infantile mind that his carrying the fish was due not so much to a wish to oblige me, as to have an excuse for coming into our kitchen to see Cicely Crowe.

"What's brought you here?" asked Cicely.

"I wanted to see you and have a bit of a talk."

"I'm busy," was her curt answer.

"Ciss, I want a good-bye before I go."

"Well, the door is open—Good-bye."

He halted at the entrance, hesitated a while, and then said: "You will be pleased to hear, Ciss, that the good-bye I asked for is one for ever."

She dropped the potato she was peeling, but did not look at him; she took up the potato again.

"I'm thinking of leaving—going to America."

She did not answer for a while, but as he waited for an observation, she said, "Indeed. Hope you'll enjoy yourself there."

"I am not going there to enjoy myself, but because—well, Ciss—I can't feel any joy here in the old country."

"You seem merry enough."

"I am not. I've always something in me, gnawing at my heart."

"Swallowed a crab, I reckon, without having him b'iled first."

"It's not that, Ciss. You know well it is not that. If one can't get now what will make a fellow happy, it's best to go, sez I."

"You'll get lots, lots over there," said she, and pointed with the knife towards the sea, America, the bed of the setting sun.

"I don't want lots—only one."

"May you find that one. I hope you will."

"Do you?" with a flash of happiness.

"Yes—in America."

He hung his head.

"I suppose," said Will, "that I shall be forgotten when I am far away."

"Those who go far away must reckon on that," was her answer. "Psha!" she had cut her finger. She quickly put a bit of potato rind over the wound lest Will should observe it. But indeed, he was looking on the floor and saw nothing.

"And, Ciss, you have nothing more to say to me?"

"Of course I have—Good-bye!"

He looked up, took a step nearer to her, gazed steadily into her face: "Cicely, do you mean it—in this way to say good-bye to one you have known all these years? It is not a light matter to cross the ocean and go to the States. Who can tell what may happen there? Some find there good luck, others, wretchedness and ruin. To go there and do well a chap must take a good heart with him. I cannot do that. I shall bear but a heartache with me, and have no hope whatever I do. Come, Ciss—what do you say?"

"The parson don't like any one coming in late for church. You'd best be off—smart."

He raised himself to his full height. The angry blood flew to his face and darkened it, fire leaped from his eyes. I had never seen Will Swan like that before.

"No—Ciss—no," he said, and he spoke hoarsely; "I will not cross the water. No, that would content you. Who can say—if things went contrary here—you might be willing to come across to me there?"

"If——"

"Yes—who can say? But I will go where there is no passage across. I will break down every bridge between us. This has been going on too long—from one year to another—and I can bear it no further. I will get married to some other

wench, some one who will give a chap a good word ; who, when one leaves only for a day will say a good-bye, and her eyes will fill with tears. She may never be to me all that you have been and are, but she will be to me what it is not in your nature to be—kind and gracious."

"Oh, that—that is it!" exclaimed Cicely. I could see, through my peephole, how flames passed through her face and then that she became deadly white. I could see how her bosom heaved, how her hands trembled as she tried to continue with the potatoes, but was unable to do anything because of her wounded finger.

Suddenly she took up the pan, thrust past Will, and threw the contents into the pig-pail. "You have made me spoil all," she said, and burst into tears.

"Crying! What for?"

"That is it. You have already lost your heart to some other girl, and now you come to say——"

"Yes, that I am going to the parson to have my banns called."

"Who is it?" she asked, looking at him, her weeping arrested, and she as one of stone.

"If I say it shall be you, what will you say?"

She tried to speak, could not, turned, put up her hand against the wall, brushed it down once, twice, again, impatiently. She could not bring the word out that she wished to say.

Will remained waiting. No answer came.

"Ciss," he said, "it shall *not* be you. Any other rather. No—you, never!"

Then he turned and left the back kitchen.

She stood for a moment watching him as he departed. Then she leaned her face in her wet hands and burst into convulsive weeping.

Snap. Wee! wee! wee! A rat was caught.

II

WILL SWAN did not go to America. What he did was to find an engagement on a small boat that went to and from Bristol, bringing groceries, earthenware, timber, ovens from Bridgewater, and which conveyed slates from the Cornish quarries to that great mercantile city which goes on building, building without ceasing. He was away sometimes for a week ; sometimes for a fortnight ; now and then for over a month. America ! He was not going to expatriate himself for a woman's sake, when there was plenty of work to be found in his native land, or rather, on the seas that washed it.

The Bristol Channel looks upon the map as though in it could be only calm water, as in the estuary of the Thames. It is, however, not so. When the wind blows from the west, how the great Atlantic billows roll in, and with what fury do they recoil and strike the faces of their brother waves also seeking an entrance ! They tread one another down; they overleap one another ; they beat one another about, and leave a long line of foam down the

centre of the Channel, the dust and wreckage of ten thousand broken waves.

And then, without. When Hartland Point has been turned, what a coast! The iron-black frowning cliffs stand up sheer from deep sea, and seem to say, "We look on all passers-by as foes; let none venture to approach us!"

And how the Atlantic billows heave there! It is no exaggeration to say that they run mountains high. Woe to the vessel, great or small, that enters or attempts to cross the great loop between Hartland and Trevose. It is a mouth to champ up and suck the life out of every boat that falls into it when the wind is inland.

Cicely heard that Will Swan had not gone to the States. She saw him occasionally in church, but when there he never looked her way. He stood up straight as a post, sang with lungs like the bellows of a blacksmith, in his blue jersey, his face brown as a coffee-berry fresh roasted, but his eye, blue as the summer sea, flashed and twinkled, but never on her.

She heard talk of him too. He was much at the Ship Inn; and Kate Varcoe, the daughter of the host, was a "likely lass," cheerful, fresh-faced, with black dancing eyes. With Kate he chaffed and made merry. Cicely listened every Sunday to hear the banns called, but no—called they were not. Next, some one said that William had a sweetheart in Bristol.

Oh, in Bristol! Then why should not she show

him that if he could be false she would be so also. For a while she allowed herself to be walked out by young Hannaway, a respectable youth, a carpenter by trade, who made the coffins for all the neighbourhood, and undertook in black for all the dead in that and the neighbouring parishes.

When next she encountered Will she was at the side of Hannaway. He was talking with some chums, and a burst of laughter from them pealed out after she had passed. Had he made some remark relative to her that had caused this merriment? Her cheeks burned. She was angry. She hated him. She was dull as a companion, and after three Sundays, as young Hannaway "got no forrader" with her, he gave her up and took to walking with Kate Varcoe.

On the quay was a long bench, whereon the sailors and fishermen were wont to sit and yarn. There Will, when at home, sat and yarne also—now about ships, then about fish, about tobacco, and last about girls. He was boastful, and laughed and said that he had only to hold up his little finger and whistle, and half-a-dozen would perch on it. But this was so strange in Will, so different from his wont, that an old pilot who had known him from a child and now heard him, shook his head and said, "He's not got that Ciss out of his head yet, I'll swear."

Then the news came that Cicely was ill—very ill; "something on the nerve," so it was said, and others opined "her orgings were gone scatt."

Will Swan asked no questions about her, but whistled "Black-eyed Susan" with his hands in his pockets. It was obvious he cared nothing for her.

Then she began to mend. The disease, whatever it was, went "off the nerve" again, or the "orgings" got patched up with powders or plaster. Very white and weak, Cicely sat at her window and looked out. One day she saw Will Swan coming along the way. "Is he about to ask after me?" she thought. No, he went by. He did not turn in at the familiar—at one time familiar—kitchen back entrance. He did not even look up at her window.

Now, at last, Cicely left our service. Her mother was dead, and some one was needed at home to keep house for her father. She left us without a word of regret. Indeed, she did not even say good-bye to my father and mother. My dear mother, in her sweet, gentle way, reproached her for it when they met.

"I thought, ma'am," said Cicely, "if you'd wanted to say good-bye, you'd ha' come to the kitchen to say it to me. 'Twasn't for me to intrude."

"Oh! Cicely, after so many years!"—my mother's eyes filled. She really loved that girl, and from the depth of my heart I believe Cicely loved her, but she was too perverse to show it.

"Now," said Cicely to herself, "I'll have no more nonsense." By which she meant that she would drive all thoughts of Will from her head. But this is easier said and resolved on than ac-

complished. And you, we will say, think that your thoughts, or fancies, are in your own power, that you can trifle with them, and, when you like, put them aside. But when the day comes that you *do* wish thus to be rid of them, then you find yourself entangled, chained in the passion, and you cannot break from it. So was it with Cicely. She thought and worked for her old father more zealously and lustily than she had for us, but only thought the more continuously on, and suffered the keener for, young Will Swan.

Summer was over; autumn harvests were gathered in; Martinmas summer had brooded over the land, enveloping all in a warm, lovely haze; and then, suddenly came the change. Without warning an equinoctial gale burst on the coast, the summer was over, the brightness past—winter had come with gloom and sadness.

On the evening after it had been blowing great guns all day, the door was thrown open, and one of the coastguard looked in.

“Jan Crowe!” called he to Cicely’s father, who had charge over the lifeboat, “there’s the *Marianne* wrecked.”

“The *Marianne*!”

Cicely uttered a cry. That was Will Swan’s vessel, or, rather, the vessel in which Will Swan was. She ran down to the beach. The sea was almost indistinguishable from the air, so lashed and shaken together was wave with wind, so intermingled were foam and rain. The air was filled

with sound. The sands trembled with the beating of the surf on them. The whole sky was brown and blurred with clouds sweeping along from the west, inland, with screaming sea-birds peppered against the vapour, and salt tears dripping out of it; now driving in rushes, then staying and drawing up as a veil, and allowing the wind full play to riot and rend between the clouds and the ocean.

All colour was gone out of land and sea and sky—gone as though melted together into one medley of dull grey, never to be gathered together into pure colour again. No outlines were clear. The bold points of land that ran out into the sea were so be-hazed with spoon-drift and rain that they had changed their appearance, they had lost their consistency, they seemed to waver and threaten to dissolve into the seething flood that beat about them.

None but an experienced eye could distinguish the *Marianne* in the haze and tossing mass of sea.

Men and women, in fluttering garments, were on the beach, with their hands to their eyes screening them, gazing seaward.

Cries rose for the boat to be launched. But in such a sea it was not possible to do anything. The *Marianne* was a wreck. No living being was on her. The captain of the coast-guard put his glass to his eye and looked steadily at the tossing—now seen, now obscured—patch that was once the *Marianne*. In the gathering darkness little could be distinguished.

"They've left her," he said. "There's none aboard but a dog. Hark! you can hear him bark."

Those near held their breath.

"I can't hear nothing," said a seaman.

"You can if you look through my glass," said the captain, "you can then both see and hear the little dog yapping. He wouldn't be yapping like that unless he'd been left behind."

"But where be they? There was Cap'n Thomas, and Simon Feathers, and Joe Wilcock, and Bill Swan."

"Aye," said another, "and there's Tony Graves; his mother be here in a terrible take-on. 'Tis the first time the boy has been so far to sea."

"Where be they?" asked the captain. "I can't see anything of a boat. They've took to it, sure as I'm here, and just as certain she's capsized."

"Then they'll be washed ashore, dead or alive," said one.

"Of course they will. 'Tain't no use trying the lifeboat when you know they're not in the vessel. You don't know where to look for 'em."

So the shore was searched, and, first one, then another was recovered; the boy Tony first, alive and not much the worse; then Joe Wilcock dead, or so near death that there seemed no chance of recovering him. With the barbarous ignorance then common, he was thrown across a barrel to let the water run out of his lungs. He struggled, gasped, and was still.

Captain Thomas, a large stout man, holding to

an oar, forged his way ashore, but he was much bruised and cut by having been beaten against sharp slate rocks like razors. He could not speak, but his eyes were lively, black eyes under white bushy brows. After a quarter of an hour he gasped out, "Where's Tony? I stood my life to his mother I'd bring him safe home."

"Safe he is," said some one near.

"Then that's right," said the captain. "Where's the rest?"

They could tell him only of Joe Wilcock. Feathers and Swan had not been washed ashore.

By this time it was night. Lanterns were flashing along the beach. Then up from the water came some one; it was Cicely, drenched to the skin, her hair streaming, but wet as seaweed. She was dragging in her arms a dark mass.

Some ran to her with lights. What she was heaving was Will Swan, conscious, for he looked at her, but speechlessly. The moment others drew nigh the girl released her load and disappeared.

The night became clearer. The wind shifted to the north, the clouds parted. Stars appeared in the patches of dark sky. The rain ceased, but the sea still thundered and gleamed white.

A knock at the cottage door of the old fellow who had charge of the lifeboat. He was out still, but Cicely opened and saw Will Swan before her with both hands extended.

She drew her hand back and looked coldly at him. He was staggered, and said: "Well, Ciss!"

"Well," she said, "what do you want here?"

Will stepped forward, and tried to put his arm round her to take a kiss. She thrust him from her impatiently.

For a moment he stood motionless, then he burst forth: "It was you—you who snatched me out of the water."

"You are mistaken, it was Jacob Finch. I stood by. I would have done that for any one."

Will became white as chalk; then almost in fury, as if he would have torn her, he cried: "Ciss! you be cruel to me and to yourself. I don't care, say yes or no, fight or bite if you will, mine you shall be, or I will carry you in these arms and throw you and myself together over the cliff into the sea."

He seized her in his strong arms, clasped her to his heart, and covered her face with kisses.

So, in a paroxysm of fury, was this courtship done.

And Cicely melted like wax against glowing iron. But only for a moment, and then said: "Well, if it must be, it must."

Fifty years have passed since that day.

There is now an old seaman sits smoking his pipe on the bench, looking seaward, and he yarns with his mates, and is looked up to and listened to by the younger men. He has got strapping sons of his own. They are seamen as was their father. He has a daughter married, and the old chap is fond of taking one of his grandchildren out with him, to walk on the quay and sit on the old bench beside him or else on his knee.

That old man is Will Swan.

The Crowe, by holy matrimony, had become a Swan.

The pretty Cicely I remembered so long ago was now dead ; and old Bill wore a black band round his blue jersey arm.

A day or two ago I was sitting by him on the bench.

He was silent for a long time, smoking and blowing clouds.

Presently he turned his face to me. I saw there was trouble in it.

" You knew my wife, sir ? " he said.

" Indeed I did, since I was a little child."

" I know you did."

Then again silence.

Presently again his face turned, and he drew his pipe from his mouth and rested it on his knee.

" You're a minister now, sir ? "

" Yes ; I am a parson."

" Then p'raps you can tell me something."

" I will tell you what I can."

" You see, sir, Ciss was that won'erful sort of a woman. Though us was married for fifty years her never once in all that time would say as her loved me."

Again a long pause ; another smoke. Then a turn to me : " You *are* a parson ? "

" Yes. What do you want ? "

" Well, you can tell me. When I get into life everlasting, do you think Ciss will meet me at the

gates o' Paradise and say: 'What are you doin' here now? Don't you go bothering of me, *I* don't want you'?"

"All that is left behind," said I, "all, all in the soil and dross of the grave. Above, the bright happy smile will break out, and the welcome, and the hands will be stretched out——"

"Thank you," he said slowly. Great tears were in his eyes and rolling down his cheeks. "I hopes the same, but I doubts it. There must be a terrible, mirac'lous change for that to come about. But things may happen past 'uman understanding, and even onions turn to apples, and jerseys to pea-jackets. No offence, sir," and he touched his forehead.



THE WEATHERCOCK



THE WEATHERCOCK

LYDIA FRENCH had a shop opposite the church. The little town or overgrown village had no market, but there were fairs held in the space before the church on one side and Lydia French's shop on the other twice in the year. Both were cattle fairs, frequented by farmers. On such occasions bullocks ran about with tails lifted, yelling men and barking dogs behind and before them, and made either for the churchyard wall or for Lydia French's shop window. The Oddfellows, moreover, held their annual feast there, and processionised behind a band, and waved banners and wore sashes, and ate and drank heartily at the "Peal of Bells." On such occasions stalls were erected in the open space, where nuts were shot for, and barley-sugar-sticks and twisted peppermint rods and brandy-balls were sold, also ginger-pop and lemonade. On all these occasions Lydia French's shop was full of customers. She, moreover, had a good *clientèle* in the entire parish, but experienced less difficulty in disposing of her goods than in getting her little bills paid.

But though there were defaulters, yet those who liquidated were in the majority, or Lydia French

would not have been the prosperous woman she was. Her aspect breathed a fulness of purse and flush of comfort that were convincing. She could afford herself, on occasion, a silk gown. She made weekly expeditions to the bank to pay in hebdomadal profits. She had recently repapered her little parlour, and the paper was white and gold.

She was generous. When children put down their pennies for acid drops or almond rock, she always made the balance incline in their favour, to their great admiration; when their mothers bought calico, she was not particular to a quarter of a yard; and she was large-hearted—she subscribed equally to the missionaries of Church and Chapel.

Lydia French was a widow. She had been married but for a twelvemonth to a commercial traveller, who had in the brief year tried her forbearance and strained her means, and she had now been a widow of three years, and was without encumbrance.

Several had made advances to her, but she soon let commercial travellers understand that none of them need apply. There was one who trafficked in a "Life of Wellington," with magnificent steel engravings, issued in parts, who laid siege to her; and when he would not take a "No" she refused to receive any more numbers of the series. Whereupon he threatened her with legal proceedings, averring that she had bound herself to Wellington from the cradle to the grave when she received

the first part. She paid up rather than go into court, and nursed bitterness of heart against travellers thenceforth. The man whom she had married was bad enough; this Wellingtonian man was "wusser," as she expressed it. It really was preposterous that such a woman, plump, prosperous, comely, should not find her man.

But, indeed, there were plenty of men who wanted her, only she was hard to please. A young farmer—she did not relish farm-work; she did not wish to give up the shop. The blooming butcher—she had an aversion for the trade. A handsome drover—he tipped. A Methodist class-leader—he was a teetotaller, and she liked her drop of mild ale.

But, finally she seemed to hesitate between two—John Newbold, the mason, and Jack Westcott—or, as the children called him, Jackie Waistcoat, the sailor.

Both were fine men, and both had good characters; the first was somewhat too heavy, the latter somewhat too lively. But where is perfection to be found? In woman, perhaps—nay, certainly—not in man.

There was this advantage to whichever she cast the kerchief, that he would not require her to give up the shop. To the shop she was attached. The shop made her a power in the parish, brought her into relation with all, gave her consequence, and drew to her a good deal of money. This, then, was a *sine quâ non*—that she should keep

the shop after marriage as before. Besides, she did not desire to have a husband always hanging about her, like a fly in hot weather, that will not be driven away. She was accustomed to independence. A man on the premises all day implied interference, and that she was determined not to tolerate.

Lydia French sat in her shop ; no business was doing this day. She had made up her account to midsummer, and the balance was good ; it made her feel good—like a bracing sermon or a melting hymn. She had taken stock—roughly. Everything was satisfactory. The little house was in excellent condition, she owned it ; that is to say, on three lives, and she had paid Newbold's bill for putting it in thorough repair. The chimney had smoked ; that was cured by the new revolving cowl. The drain from the sink had emitted smells ; that was rectified—Newbold had put down a stink-trap. Newbold was a useful man when any masonry work was required. Could she put up with him for always—for better, for worse ?

She looked up, and looked out at her little window between the bottles of pink and pallid drops, and the withered oranges that would no longer sell, and the stay-laces, and the ginger-beer bottles, and the can of mustard, and the tin of biscuits. And she saw that which was to her a constant worry—the weathercock on the church spire.

In the great gale of the preceding November the cock had been blown on one side, the spindle on

which for many years it had revolved had been bent over, so that now the poor bird lay on his back in mid-air, and could neither right himself nor turn with the wind.

Mrs. French, neat in herself, orderly in her house, above all, in the shop, could not endure to see what was out of place, inverted, useless. She had liked to know from which direction the wind blew. It had provided her with conversation with her customers. It had satisfied her sense of the fitness of things that the spindle on the spire should be upright, and that the vane should fulfil the object for which it was ordained.

Now more than six months had passed, and the cock was still reversed. She had remonstrated with the parson.

"My dear Mrs. French," he had replied, "that is the affair of the churchwardens. I have badgered all my friends, and impoverished myself over the restoration of the church—I can do no more."

She complained to the churchwardens. "Lor' bless y'," said they, "there be no levying o' church-rates now, what can *we* do?"

"It really is a scandal," said Lydia. "And now the village feast is coming on, and the Oddfellows will march about, and the cock will——"

"Be an odd fellow, too, turned upside down, like many of the heads after ale and punch."

"I don't like it," said Lydia. "I sees it with its blessed feet turned up and its comb down—helpless. It is real unchristian and inhuman to let it bide so."

The churchwardens said, "Meddlin' with aught on the steeple is darned expensive. Beside, 'taint everywhere you can find a steeplejack."

So Lydia fidgeted and mused and schemed: that vane became the trouble of her life.

In at the shop door came simultaneously, from opposite directions, the builder and the mariner.

They had a curious knack, these men, of spying on each other, and of denying each other the opportunity of having a few words in private with the widow.

In this, however, the sailor had the advantage over the mason, for he was not daily engaged, as was the other. But Newbold so contrived that when he was absent, should Westcott endeavour to steal a march on him, his mother or his sister should invade the shop and so prevent privacy.

Which was the favoured swain neither could decide; but that was not wonderful, for Lydia had not decided for herself.

"Good-morning, mem," said the mason. "I'll just trouble you for an ounce of bird's-eye."

"And I'll have some of Virginia shag," said the sailor.

"Fine day, mem," said Newbold.

"Which way is the wind?" asked the widow.

"East by nor'-east," answered Westcott.

"Ah! then we shall have fine weather, and lasting for the revel."

"Hope so," said the mason.

"It is really distressing—I can now never tell

the way of the wind. It is as bad as having a kitchen clock as won't work. That there church stag——”

Mrs. French never spoke of the weathercock, but used the local term for a cock, which throughout Devon is invariably—a stag.

“Ah!” said Newbold.

“Well, now,” said Westcott.

“It really do seem a burnin’ shame to have the poor unfort’nate bird lyin’ on his back and kickin’ at the clouds, and that, too, on the day of the parish feast. What will folk say of us? That we’ve no public spirit left. The farmers might get up a subscription. Would it be so amazin’ expensive? Would they have to scaffold all the tower up, and to the top of the spire?”

“That’s the way masons ‘ud set about it,” said Jack Westcott contemptuously.

“And pray how ‘ud sailors do it?”

“Swarm up,” said Jack.

“Get along! That wouldn’t do it.”

“Yes, it would, I bet a guinea. I might, but you——” The sailor shrugged his shoulders.

“For the matter of that,” observed the builder, after musing a while, “I don’t see but what it might be done, and done at no terrible cost. There’s a sort of a window on each side of the spire, and I suppose it would be possible to run out planks and make a sort of a platform and set up a ladder agin the steeple.”

“Would it not be dangerous?”

"Oh, of course there's nothing in that way without danger. But if it has to be done, it can be done."

"I warrant I'd get up without any of your arrangements," said the mariner.

"I daresay you might," responded the builder slowly; "but what good would that be? You've more to do than spike a Jacky Tar at the top; you've got to remove the spindle, and that must be roped and let down with caution. There's a deal of things belonging to all things," said Newbold sententiously, "and that's what escapes the likes of you."

"I bet I'd do it!" said the sailor.

"I bet so would I!" said the mason.

"But," added the latter, "I ain't going to risk my precious life and sacrifice time and labour for nothin'."

"Now look here," said Westcott, "there be you and me hoverin' round about this here lovely creetur, each sunnin' of ourselves in her beamin' eyes and neither on us gettin' no closer, and both of us lusty fellows, one accustomed to masts and other to scaffold-poles——"

"I take you," interrupted the mason; "we between us is to set the weathercock to rights out of love to this adorable female."

"Not just precisely that," said the mariner. "Between us won't do. What if we each went up the steeple simultaneous, and from opposite sides? Wouldn't the distance atween us be every

foot of ascent lessenin' and lessenin', till our faces met at the top? And I bet a guinea we wouldn't kiss there; we'd come to a grapple."

"Really," said the widow, with a shudder, "this is startling. A contest on the pinnacle of the spire between you—and all for me. I ain't worth it."

"Not worth it!" exclaimed the mason, and was about to fall on his knees, when the sailor pointed to his boot, and brandished his foot menacingly. "I can't allow that—not in my presence."

"We will draw lots who is to go up and attempt it," said the mason.

"And who is to have fair field and no interference for courtin'," said the mariner.

"Done! It shall be so!" said Newbold.

"I agrees," said Westcott.

"Now there is one thing I bargain for," observed the builder. "If he who first attempts it fails and falls, and gets squelched, don't let the other take advantage, and shirk doing of it in his turn. Let him also venture like a man."

"Like a man!" echoed the tar. "'England expects every man to do his dooty.'"

"Come, shall we draw matches?"

"Matches! It's a match for one alone."

"Then toss up."

"Toss up you are. And the winner has fair field and no just cause or impediment why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony."

"Here is a penny," said Newbold.

"A penny! You ought to blush the colour of the copper to suggest it. I will toss only gold for such a bloomin' and lovely lady. Here is a sovereign. Heads or Royal Arms—which?"

"Heads for me!" said Newbold.

"And arms—them extended arms for me," said Jack Westcott, with a leer at the widow.

The sailor tossed the sovereign.

"Heads!" he exclaimed.

"Best of three," said the mason condescendingly.

"Tails!" said Jack, after the second toss.

Now all paused and looked at each other. The widow's face expressed anxiety.

Up went the gold piece once more, whisking high, and Westcott caught it, but paused a moment before opening his palms.

"Come, man! Let us see our fate." said Newbold.

The sailor raised his right hand, and the sovereign in his left disclosed the reverse of the coin uppermost.

"I've won!" said the builder. "It is I who am to have the first shot at the weathercock."

"And I bide below with the lady," said the mariner.

"Let me consider," mused Newbold. "I have a little job on hand for Squire Theobald; it will take me about a week, and my ladders be all engaged. But I'll tell you what. Monday week will suit me, and that will be time enough before the feast."

"Oh, Mr. Newbold, do not be *too* rash," pleaded the widow.

"Ma'am, I would dare anything for you," he answered gravely.

The tidings that John Newbold was going to ascend the spire and put the vane to rights produced lively satisfaction in the breasts of the villagers, and awoke vast curiosity to know how he would set to work to accomplish it.

The day was fine—grey with occasional drifts of fog, but nothing to signify, and there was happily no wind. Nearly every parishioner was out to observe proceedings. Nearly—not all; there were exceptions. Mrs. French did not quit her shop. It neither comported with her ripe dignity to be seen among the rabble staring up at the sky, nor with her affairs, for a crowd on the green promised customers for ginger-beer and lollipops.

To her came Jack Westcott.

"Good-morning, mem. I thought, with your good favour, I'd fill my pouch with Virginia shag. And I'd like—if you have no objection—to see how that chap goes about it from within, on your premises."

The widow bowed.

"Do you think, Mr. Westcott, there is real danger? I should never forgive myself——"

"Lord bless you. That mason chap wouldn't do nothing that would hurt the tip of his nose. You'll see. He'll just run out some planks and nail a strip o' wood across, and lash his ladders as well

as lean them agin the strip. Bless your angel face and shining eyes, he'll make all secure for himself."

"But, Mr. Westcott, it really looks a most perilous undertaking."

"Not more so than this," said the sailor, suddenly swinging himself over the counter. "Excuse me, lovely creature! But I can't well see what goes on on the side of the shop door; there's all them darned advertisements block it up. But here—if I may be so bold as to watch."

"You can take a chair, Mr. Westcott."

"Never! unless you take one as well."

So, with a little complimenting and resistance, it was settled: the widow and the suitor seated themselves on her side of the counter on two chairs, and looked out through the shop window at the proceedings of the builder.

Now it was seen how he emerged from the lower window of the spire, and how cautiously a short ladder was set up against it, by which, when made secure, he mounted, and placed himself astride the gable. Then a larger ladder was advanced against the incline of the steeple, and set so as to reach a considerable way up. This the mason ascended, and by some means he secured the ladder.

"It's as easy as telling lies," said the sailor. "I believe there are iron crooks let into the steeple."

"But it looks dreadfully insecure," said the widow. "Do see! he is like a fly against a rod."

"More like a bumble-bee," said Jack.

"What if he was to lose his head?"

"Not such a risk to him as to me," sighed the mariner.

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Westcott?"

"Only I never can see any man swarmin' up a mast or so but I feel an itch in my palms to be grapplin' of somethin'. You'll excuse me if I put my arm round and lay hold of the back of your chair."

"If it's any comfort to you, Mr. Westcott."

"I don't think that chair-back very firm," observed Jack.

"Oh! do, do look!" exclaimed the widow. "He is on one ladder, and thrusting up another hands over head! and, oh! if his feet were to give way! if he were to stagger! if the ladder were to slip! oh, I feel—I feel quite giddy and faint."

"Lean on me," said Jack; "and—drat that chair-back! it is cracked. That's more substantial and agreeable to both parties." He slipped his arm round her waist. "England expects every man to do his duty."

"I really cannot bear to see poor dear Mr. Newbold thus risk his precious life."

"Then don't," said Westcott; and rising, he brought close together the bottles of mixed sweets and almond-rock in the window. "There, now you can't see nor be seen. Are you better, my angel?"

"Rather," responded Lydia in a faint voice. "And yet I'm all of a tremble. What if he was to fall?"

"We'd mingle our tears over his grave," said the sailor. "Now, look you here."

"I can't; I've such a swimming in my head. O Jack! I can still see something—a fog has swept over the top of the spire; or is it that my eyes are deceived? He's gone! He's gone!"

"It is so—a passing drift of vapour. He's all right. It will cool him. Now, Lydia, this won't do. You'll fret yourself into a brain-fever if you look at him even between the interstices of sweetie-bottles and biscuit-tins. I must convey you where you cannot see him at all; and there's no place better than inside the church. And, by ginger! there goes the parson. I'll call him; he will let us in. And—Lydia, I took the precaution to have a license; it cost me half-a-guinea—here it is. You'd never be so unreasonable as to have that chucked away, so come along."

"O Jack! I wouldn't do anything as wasn't right and honourable. He, up there"—with her chin she indicated the top of the spire, then enveloped in fog—"he'll expect to have me if he brings down the stag."

"Not a bit, my dear. Nothing was set down in writing, but I call you to witness—he who had the choice was to go up the spire and leave the coast clear for the other to propose, and to offer no just cause or impediment. Was it not so?"

"I did not quite understand it in that light."

"But I did."

"Will Mr. Newbold, though?"

"My dear Lydia, he is up in a fog. England expects every man to do his duty. Here's the license. Come along."

Two hours later, with a triumphant air and firm stride, the builder entered the shop, dragging along an immense battered weathercock detached from the spindle. It had once been gilt, it was now in a rusty, measly condition. Within he saw the widow and sailor side by side.

"Done!" shouted he. "I've got the cock!"

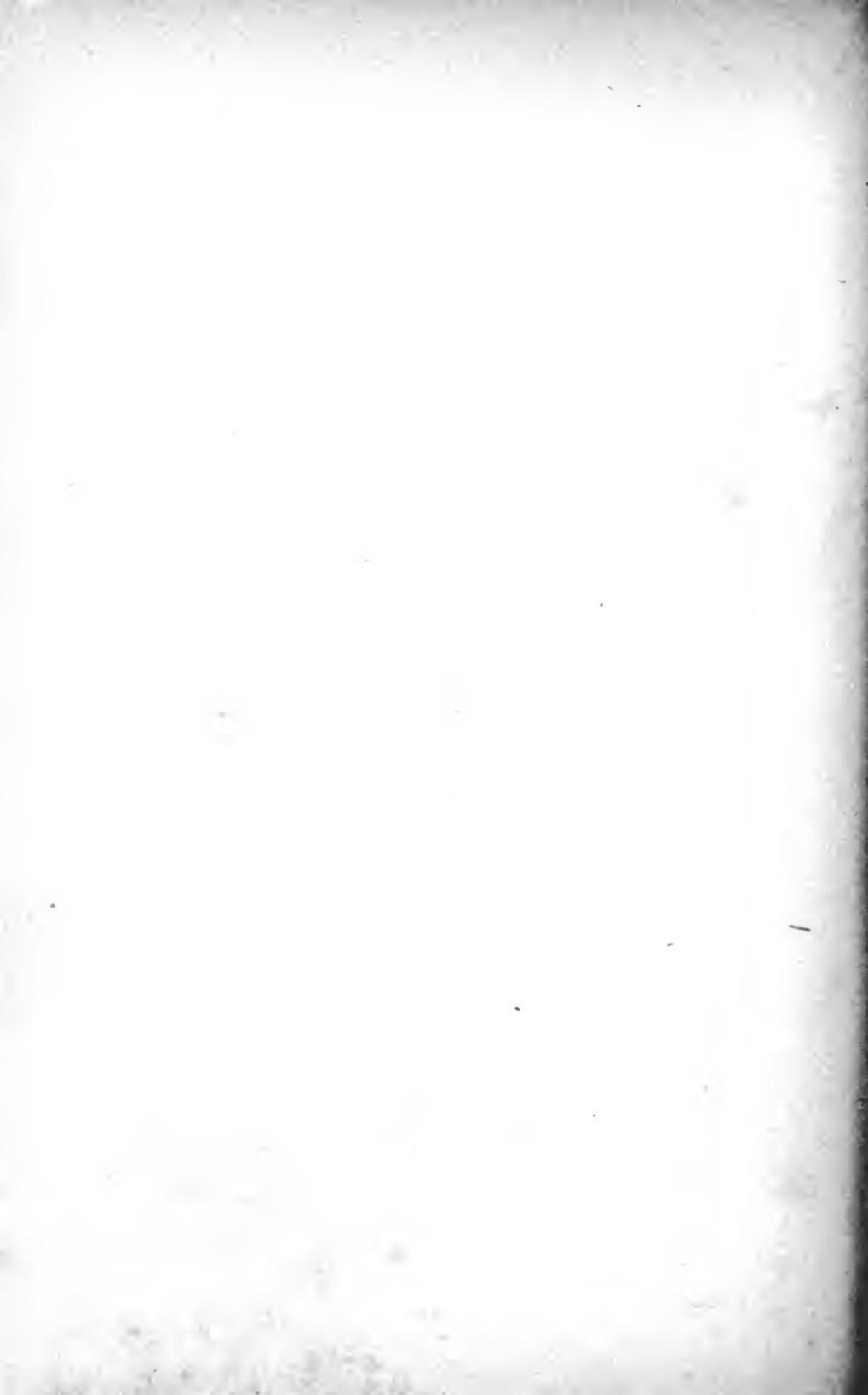
"Done!" replied the mariner. "I've won the hen!"

"I've been up in the clouds," said Newbold.

"And I *am* in the seventh heaven. I've not been in the clouds like you. Let me introduce you to Mrs. Westcott!"



A PLUM-PUDDING



A PLUM-PUDDING

AS far as man could suppose, every element that goes to make up happiness was united to bless Mr. and Mrs. Birdwood.

He was in easy circumstances ; that is to say, he had earned enough money not to be obliged to work any longer, and had his own little house, and could keep a “slavey.” He was inoffensive in his pursuits, being fond of flowers, especially of roses, which he grafted ; and what harm can there be in a man who loves gardening ? Next to marrying a curate, a woman has a good certainty of her husband turning out amiable and orderly if he grafts roses. Then, again, he was in the prime of life, by no means bad-looking, amiable and placid. You could not study his face and not see that he was good-humoured. On the other hand, Mrs. Birdwood was comely, a lively woman, neat in shape, under thirty, and of a florid complexion —which ought to suit a man addicted to flowers.

She had made a good match, said her friends, for she was one of fourteen, and had come penniless to his arms. She had been Eliza Gubbins, and had dropped the Gubbins at the altar. No one could deny that she was the gainer when she

acquired a name that carried with it a suggestion of piping and tooting and whistling and jug-jugging and cooing of all kinds of song-birds.

But there is a fly in every cup, a thorn to every rose, some bone in every joint you get from the butcher, a cloud in every sky.

Mr. Birdwood was of an over-placid and too easy-going nature to satisfy Mrs. Birdwood, who was impulsive, exacting, and sanguine.

He accepted connubial felicity as he did his meals—as something anticipated, necessary, and ordinary. Instead of exhibiting an effusion of gratitude to his wife for making him happy, he budded his roses, and divided his bulbs, and potted his tubers as though that were the main object of his life, instead of falling down and admiring that luminous transcendental being who had condescended to come into Jessamine Villa to be *his happiness*.

They had been married a twelvemonth—rather more. Eliza Gubbins had supposed that an enamoured swain, after marriage, would grow in love, like a conflagration, which increases as you add fuel. But it was not so; he was warm and approving, but never rose above blood-heat. Moreover, he had a provoking Christian name—Josiah—that he could not alter. Eliza had fed on poetry and romance in her maiden days, and the name, Josiah, had in it nothing poetical, no romance.

"I can't call you Jos," she said, "for that is the short for Joseph or Joshua."

"Then call me Siah."

"Sire. No, thank you; it would seem as though I regarded you as my sovereign."

As yet there was no child, nor prospect of one. This fact might have been considered a reason why they should have been more than ever devoted to one another, as there was no distraction, no one else in the house to love, except the slavey, and she was, naturally, out of the question.

But it was not so. Mrs. Birdwood had nothing else to think about except the lack of ardour in Mr. Birdwood, and nothing else to do but fret over it.

"My dear," said Josiah Birdwood one day at table, "my dear, I think Maggie Finch is just about your size and build."

"Maggie Finch!—and who is she?"

"I mean the girl at Miss Thomas's, the dress-maker's."

"Maggie Finch, indeed!" exclaimed Eliza, turning first red, then white. "And pray, what do you know about"—witheringly—"Maggie Finch?"

"Oh, nothing, my dear, only she is in Miss Thomas's shop."

"And what do *you* know of Miss Thomas's shop?"

"Why not, my dear? You go to Mr. Gardener's—Mr. Gardener the tailor, I mean."

"Of course, I do. I have tailor-made dresses."

"Then why should not I go to the milliner's to have a milliner-made suit?"

"It is preposterous. Maggie Finch, indeed ! How do you know she is a Maggie ?"

"Miss Thomas calls her so. Besides——"

"Well ?" sternly eyeing him.

"I got her the situation."

"Oh ! I see ! you got her the situation."

"Yes. Her poor father——"

"I want to hear nothing of the poor father ; it is poor Maggie you think of. I see all, clear as daylight—a Finch and a Birdwood match much better than a Gubbins and a Birdwood." Then she burst into tears.

"My dear, be reasonable, and—kindly give me a spoonful of gravy ; my bacon is dry."

"How can you ! How can you ! Heartless, cruel man ! Oh that I had married a commercial traveller !"

"A bagman, my dear !"

"You need not open your mouth, nostrils, and eyes with such a snorting affectation of surprise. I said it—a commercial traveller."

"I did not know, my dear——"

"No. You did not know that I had a—a tender corner in my heart, a general predilection for commercials. They go about in flights, like humming-birds in the Brazilian forests."

"Have you been in Brazil, dear ?"

"No, I have not; but I have read of them. Living—animated jewels they are."

"Which ? The bagmen or the humming-birds ?"

"I won't speak to you any more. You pur-

posely misunderstand me to insult me, that you may go off to your Maggie Finches."

"There is only one, dear."

"And so much the worse. You focus, you concentrate, on that wretched object the admiration, the love, of which I am bereaved. If you go gallivanting and meandering round dressmakers' assistants, I can do the same. I will not be left out in the cold for any Maggie Finches, I can tell you. There are plenty of bagmen, as you call them—commercials is their proper designation—who would be only too glad, too proud, to lick the dust off my feet."

"My dear, you are hot."

"I have occasion to be hot."

"And my tea is cold."

"This is an outrage!"

Mrs. Birdwood rose and flounced out of the room. She rushed upstairs, casting at the slavey, *en passant*, a notice to quit, for no particular reason, but as a vent to her wrath; and she dashed into the bedroom, where nothing had as yet been put in order, and threw herself in the arm-chair and burst into a flood of tears. She remained for some time crying and fanning herself into a greater flame of wrath. Then she rose and went to the window. She saw her husband—he had taken off his coat, and he was digging in the garden. He had told her, the previous evening, that he expected hard frost, and would turn up the mould, that the slugs might be killed. Actually, after that scene, after

those reproaches hurled at him, after that exposure, he was placidly digging, that the frost might kill the slugs.

Really the man was unendurable.

About an hour later he drew on his coat and came in, and brushed down his trousers and washed his hands.

Mrs. Birdwood lurked about watching. He went out at the front door, passed into the street, and disappeared. Mrs. Birdwood drew on her cloak, adjusted a hat, and followed.

She had hardly reached the gate before she saw Josiah turn in at a door to a shop some way up the street, over which was inscribed: "Thomas: Milliner and Dressmaker."

"The die is cast. Flaunting his vices in the face of his wife! I, too, can be vicious. If he goes hunting dressmakers, I—even I—can seek commercial travellers."

She set her lips. Her eyes glared. Her face was terrible in its wrath.

She hastened to retrace her steps, gathered together a few of her most valued and necessary goods, and left the house.

"There!" said she, slamming the iron gate after her. "There! Two can play at this game. If he deserts me, I also can desert him. Good-bye to Jessamine Villa! Oh that I had married a commercial!"

She took her way to the station. "Let me see," said she; "I'll go a-junketing to the seaside and

enjoy myself. Happily I have money; he gave me enough to pay the monthly bills. Won't he be surprised when he comes back from Finching to find me flown! Yes—I'll go to Sandbourne and enjoy the sea breezes, and pick up shells and seaweeds, and look at the visitors, and perhaps a commercial or two may flit past my admiring eyes. Their manners are so elegant; they have such persuasive ways; their address is so engaging!"

Furnished with a ticket, she got into a second-class carriage. She was about to enjoy herself, so she would not go third—and she had money to spend.

There was a gentleman in the carriage. He had been seeing a number of large black boxes put into the luggage van. He took his seat after Mrs. Birdwood had ensconced herself in a corner, hoping to have a carriage to herself.

Off went the train.

As already said, Mrs. Birdwood was a comely woman, and this the other traveller perceived, and was unable to take his eyes off her. If a cat may look at a king, then surely a commercial may gaze on a pretty woman! Mrs. Birdwood did not like it, and put up her hand to let down her veil; unhappily, in her hurry at leaving, she had forgotten her veil.

"Christmas coming soon," said the gentleman; "a time of holly and mince-pies—and above all, of mistletoe! I think I know some one who would like

to be under a mistletoe bush with somebody else, unnamed."

"And I think," said Mrs. Birdwood, "I know some one who would like to have a bunch of holly with which to whack into somebody else—unnamed!"

"Going any distance, miss?" asked the bagman.

"I don't quite know where I am going," inadvertently replied the runaway wife. Then she bit her tongue in vexation at having said what she had.

"Let me recommend Sandbourne," said he confidently. "A charming place—beautiful beach. Excuse me, I think the ticket you hold—ah! it is for Sandbourne. How happy a coincidence! I am going there as well. If I can be of any assistance with your luggage, command me."

"I have none."

"Indeed! Going to friends?"

She was silent. Tears came into her eyes—tears of mortification and anger.

"My dear young lady," said the fellow-passenger, "I trust I have not touched on any tender point. When lovely woman stoops to conquer—especially with tears as her weapons—she is irresistible."

"Really, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Birdwood, "I must request you to desist from these impertinences and this odious familiarity."

"A thousand pardons—I am mute."

On reaching Sandbourne station Mrs. Birdwood dismounted from the train, greatly relieved to be

able to shake off the gentleman who had annoyed her. She sought out a modest inn, and then walked down to the shore.

"A pretty pass Josiah will be in," thought she, "when he finds that I am gone! There will be ructions in the house. Well, if he will run after Finches, he must take the consequences. And Christmas coming on as well, and no comforts, no plum-pudding. I'll be bound that Jemima will serve up the roast beef without any horse-radish—serve him right; and as to Yorkshire pudding, she can't make it!—very glad. He'll suffer where most sensitive. Oh!" She saw a large coloured poster. "A circus! I have not seen one since I was a girl. I will go."

But she did not enjoy herself at the horsemanship. Her mind reverted to Jessamine Villa, and to a plum-pudding she had made a month ago, and had put away in a tin to be ready for Christmas. She wished she had brought it with her; but she had left it behind, locked up. Her husband knew nothing about it. The slavey was equally ignorant. Now that costly and excellent plum-pudding would be lost, for she would never go back to Jessamine Villa—never, never within the sound of the name of Finch.

That plum-pudding had been made from an excellent recipe given her by her mother—

"5 lb. suet, 4 lb. flour, 3 lb. bread-crumbs, 4½ lb. raisins, 3 lb. currants, 1½ lb. sugar, 1 lb. mixed peel, 1 pint old ale, 1 nutmeg, 6 teaspoonfuls salt, 2 quarts

milk, 12 eggs; boiled 8 hours; a sufficient quantity for 9 puddings, 4 of which are large."

She could rehearse it by heart. Of course, in the small establishment at Jessamine Villa nine puddings—four of which were large—were not required. But the late Mrs. Gubbins had been a woman with a large family and a larger heart, and she had been accustomed to send puddings to her married sons and daughters. Mrs. Birdwood had halved everything, and then had been able to give a pudding to an aunt at Bandon, another she had sent to a married brother in London, a small one she had reserved for a poor old woman who received her charities, and the rest were for Jessamine Villa consumption. And now—

"Dear, dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Birdwood, not observing anything in the arena.

"I beg pardon—did you mean me?" asked a voice. She turned, and saw the commercial traveller beside her.

"No, sir!" she retorted sharply. "I alluded to the pudding; with raisins at fivepence, and only nine eggs a shilling, it is dear, very dear, inexpressibly dear."

"I beg your pardon again; I don't quite take it in."

"The pudding was not for your consumption, sir."

"You would confer on me, miss, a great favour if you would give me your name. A thousand apologies for asking."

"My name is—" She choked; should she give her married or her maiden name? "Never mind."

"And mine is Fisher. I am in the hosiery and haberdashery business. That is to say, I travel for a firm in that line. I am now staying at the 'Woolpack.'"

"At the 'Woolpack'! So am I!" she cried in dismay. "This will never do—no, never!"

She dashed out of the circus, went to the inn, removed her trifling effects, paid her bill, and departed to the "Red Lion."

Next morning she came down to the coffee-room, and was dismayed to find there Mr. Fisher.

"Good gracious me!" she exclaimed, "I thought you were at the 'Woolpack'?"

"So I was; but as it seemed to offend you, and I could not think of annoying a lady, I went back when the performance was over, paid my account, and departed to another inn—the 'Red Lion.'"

"This will never do!" gasped Mrs. Birdwood. "I shall leave immediately!"

She hastened to the station and took the train for Bandon; she would go to her aunt. The plum-pudding had preceded her; if she followed, it was but like a player of bowls, who delivers his ball and then runs after it.

Her aunt was pleased to see her, and asked what occasioned this visit. Mrs. Birdwood made the excuse that she wished to see her before Christmas, and that she had friends in Bandon she also desired

to see. She had not visited them since her—she gulped—her marriage. “I dare say, auntie, I may remain here a few days.”

“Delighted, my dear, to see you; but you do not intend to remain long—because Christmas is at hand—the day after to-morrow—and of course you will be back for that?”

Mrs. Birdwood looked down, and did not answer. Next morning she went to see friends. About mid-day she returned, when she was encountered by her aunt in the passage. “My dear—dreadful news! Have you heard?”

“Heard—no. What?”

“It comes from Jemima’s mother, your maid-of-all-work as you took from here at my recommendation. She writ to her mother yesterday evening; and it is shocking—orful!”

“What is it, aunt?”

Mrs. Birdwood turned white; that slavey had written that her mistress had run away, and—doubtless with amplifications of her own—run away with a commercial in the hosiery and haberdashery line, and had been seen with him at a circus at Sandbourne.

“You must prepare yourself for the worst,” said the aunt.

“I know it—I know it!” gasped Mrs. Birdwood.

“I don’t see how you can, as it only happened yesterday,” said the old lady.

“Well, tell me all—hold back nothing!”

"Your dear Josiah—he's gone and scalded hisself to death, in trying to bile a plum-pudding for his Christmas dinner. The flesh is come off in collops—just like an over-boiled leg of veal—with rice, you know. Don't cling to th' bone. I had a rabbit too, once——"

Mrs. Birdwood uttered a cry; she did not stay to hear about the rabbit, but flew to the station. She was just in time to catch a train. She took her ticket for—she asked for one to Jessamine Villa, but the clerk said there was no such station; then she recalled the name of the town in the outskirts of which Jessamine Villa was situated.

Weeping, trembling, sick at heart, she sat in the third-class carriage, as she was whirled home—to the home she had left, to the husband she had deserted.

On reaching the station where she had to disembark she flew to the villa. From a distance she could see—the blinds were drawn down; but then it was evening, and a lamp was alight within—was it where he was laid out in his bones?

She burst in at the door, bathed in a dew of anguish as well as heat, rushed into the sitting-room, and found there Mr. Birdwood in an arm-chair by the fire, his foot up, reading a catalogue of horticultural structures.

"Well, my dear," said he, "back again?"

"And you—you have been scalded?"

"Yes; my foot."

"How?"

"Jemima said she couldn't make a Christmas plum-pudding, and I said we must have one, so I tried my hand."

"But the flesh—has it left the bone in collops?"

"No; I am blistered, that is all. I spilt the mess over my foot. It was not quite on the boil, I believe."

"Goodness me! And how did you make the mess?"

"All right—raisins and flour."

"No suet?"

"No."

"No mixed peel?"

"Never thought of it."

"Any old ale?"

"Of course not."

"Nor eggs?"

"Did not suppose they were wanted."

"Then," said Mrs. Birdwood, "it was a mess. I am glad it was all spilt." She heaved a sigh. "Oh, Josiah, how could you?"

"I did my level best," he replied. "Now look here. Do you see that parcel? Open it. It is a silk gown—my Christmas present to you, all ready for you to wear to church to-morrow. It was fitted on Maggie Finch, as she is your size and shape."

With trembling fingers Mrs. Birdwood opened the parcel and drew forth a really gorgeous silk dress.

"Oh!" she said, "and that Finch——"

"She served as dummy on which to fit it, you know."

"And that was all that took you to Miss Thomas's?"

"What more do you want? Not an evening dress also—low-breasted and shoulder-straps?"

"Oh! oh! oh! Josiah, I have been so wicked. I thought—but never mind what I thought. I intended to run away and desert you—fancy!—for ever."

"Pshaw! you couldn't do it."

"And to take up with a commercial!"

"My dear, you couldn't do it."

"And his name Fisher."

"Not a humming-bird, but a king-fisher, I suppose."

"But in the hosiery and haberdashery line."

"You couldn't do it."

"I really believe you are right," said Mrs. Birdwood, throwing herself on his neck and bursting into tears.

"There, there, dear; that will suffice," said Josiah.

"And," asked his wife, "what did you think when I disappeared?"

"I didn't think anything about it. I knew it was all right."

"And what have you been doing without me?"

"Well, I have been trying to make up my mind whether to have a span or a lean-to conservatory."

"You are positively incorrigible."

"Then I tried my hand on the plum-pudding and failed. So now we shall have to do without."

"No, ten thousand times no," replied Mrs. Birdwood triumphantly. She went to a corner cupboard, unlocked it, produced a tin, took off the lid. "Here—here is a real plum-pudding for our happy Christmas dinner."

"And," said Mr. Birdwood, "I bought a sprig of mistletoe at the door, and will kiss you under it."

A CHRISTMAS TREE



A CHRISTMAS TREE

TOM MOUNTSTEPHEN was dressed in his very best—a black coat, a tie of blue satin studded with veritable planets, and in it a new zodiacal sign—a fox in full career, that formed the head of a pin. Tom's collar was so stiffly starched and so high that to turn his head and look over the top of that Wall of China was impossible. If he desired to see that which lay to his right or left, he was compelled to turn his entire body, as on a pivot.

Tom was unaccustomed to such a “rig out,” and therefore did not look happy in it. Tom in his workaday suit, of the colour of the earth, with a string tied under his knees, gathering the trouser together, and with a dusty slouched wideawake stuck at the back of his head, but on one side of that, and with his great, honest, cheery face, ever with a smile on the lips and a dancing light in his eyes—thus Tom was picturesque, delightful. But Tom in his Sunday best did not look at his best.

The day was Christmas Eve, and there was to be a supper with a dance at the Hall, given by the squire to his workmen and their families. Tom was on his way to this, with a face that shone with yellow soap and the friction of a rough towel; and

not only so, but he was to attend thither Isabella Frowd, the belle of the village, and one with whom, as every one said, he had made it up, and a handsome couple they would be. "Bless y'," said Tom, when folks asked him when it would be, "Lor' bless y', you know more about it than me! Go and ax Bella. She, maybe, can fix it. 'Taint my place, you know!" And then he laughed, and thought he had said a good thing.

Tom Mountstephen was an active, intelligent young fellow, serving as under-gardener, getting a respectable wage, and there was positively no reason why he should not marry; but he was inert in just this one particular, or unable to make up his mind.

Isabella was three years his junior, with a very delicate skin and lovely rosy complexion, fair hair, and forget-me-not blue eyes; somewhat doll-like, save in this, that a doll is never self-conscious, and self-consciousness spoke out of every look of Bella's eyes, every turn of her head, every motion of her body. But was she to be blamed? I think not. The squire always had a pleasant word to give her; the young ladies at the Hall made much of her; every one with one voice declared that she was a beauty and the pride of the village. Under such circumstances she must have been endowed with unusual common-sense and strength of character not to have become vain and self-satisfied.

Bella lived at the Lodge, and it was her practice to open the gates when carriages drove up; and on such occasions she was quite aware that the

ladies, and above all the gentlemen, looked at her, and when, immediately after passing, she saw them turn to each other and say something, then she was confident that they said : "What a pretty girl!" And being obliged to keep herself neat and nicely dressed did much towards making her attractive.

It was understood, or half-understood, that Tom would call at the Lodge on his way to the Hall and pick up Isabella, and go on with her. It was in this way. The day before, Tom had said to her : "More wu'nerful things may hap, Bell, than that I should come and fetch you away to the Hall to-morrow, and then you'll give me the fust dance and five arter."

"Well, I'm sure I don't mind," she had replied ; and so it was understood that he should go for her, and that she should expect him.

"Why, whatever be you about, Polly ?" exclaimed Tom Mountstephen, as he came upon a tall, pale girl with pick and spade over her shoulder.

That girl was Mary Mauduit, who lived with a frail, suffering little sister in a cottage, and supported herself by needlework and starching and washing. She had been a teacher in the school, but had been compelled to resign, owing to her sister's health. These two were together, and they were orphans. The child could not be left.

"Why, Tom, how fine you be ! Where be you a-going to ?"

That is the way in the country : a question begets another before it is answered.

"I be going to the Hall; there's grand goings on there to-night."

"So I've heerd, but I didn't mind it. And I reckon that Bella will be there too?"

"For certain. But what are you after with pick and shovel, I'd like for to know?"

"If you must know everything, Tom, it's for little Bess."

"Not going to dig her grave?"

Tom could have bitten his tongue out—he was mad with himself for uttering such a question. It had bounced out of his mouth without thought, and now he saw the colour rush into Mary's face, her eyes fill, and her lips tremble.

"Hang me for an idjot!" said Tom; "I didn't mean it; it's just like my ways, Poll. I want to say summut smart, and just say the wrong thing always. But what be you about wi' them tools?"

"It's this, Tom: I thought I'd give little Bessie a Christmas tree. I've got a few trifles to hang on it—some oranges and nuts and a needle-case and so; and I got Mrs. Wonnacott to come in for an hour and sit wi' her whilst I went to the plantation after a tree; the squire gave me leave," she added in explanation and self-exculpation.

"But, dear heart alive! you don't want pick and spade for gettin' up a young spruce! You want the chopper or a little handsaw."

"I don't wish to kill the tree. I thought if I get her up by the roots I could plant her again in the garden, and she'd grow up to a big tree, and it

'ud be something to look at—every year growin' bigger."

"What sized tree do you want?"

"Not such a terrible big one. Just middlin' like. I can't have her too small, as I ain't got no tapers like the tiny red and yaller and green 'uns they had up to the Parsonage last Christmas. I've only got bits o' common candle ends, and they'd be too heavy for a mite of a tree."

"And how will you bring back your tree and the mores (roots), Mary, wi' soil, and pick, and all together?"

"I reckon I can make two journeys."

"You can't make two for the tree!"

Mary stood silent.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Polly. I'll off with this dratted collar and put aside my new coat, and away with you to the plantation. If you go and mistake and have up a deodara or a douglas instead o' a spruce, the squire'll kick and scream."

"You're too kind, Tom; but you'll be late for the entertainment."

"Oh, that's nothing—not two minutes! She'll wait."

He did not explain, but Polly understood that *she* signified Bella. But she did not know that it had been understood that Tom was to fetch the pretty girl from the Lodge.

"I daresay you'll let me put my coat and that dratted collar in your cottage? Lor', Polly, I'm like a donkey in a pound when I've that there collar on,

jumpin' up and down and tryin' to look over the wall and clear it if I can!"

A couple of minutes later Tom, divested of collar and coat, with pick and spade over his shoulder, was attending Mary Mauduit, when the head-gardener passed. He was a Scotchman, and a widower—a man of much self-confidence and independence.

"What—off, Mr. Mountstephen?"

The gardener addressed his subordinates with a "mister." It made himself more important; marked the distance between them more emphatically.

"Yes, Mr. MacSweeny; just to take up a young spruce for she."

"Ta-ta!" said the Scotchman condescendingly, and passed on.

"He's been a bit snuffy wi' me," said Tom confidently to his companion. "What it's all about I can't tell. Perhaps he guesses I knows too much; but Lor! I'm not one to blab."

"Perhaps he's a little jealous," said Mary slyly; "folk do say he has been thinking about Bella. But there—'tain't no good dreaming of going against you, Tom."

"I don't give no heed to them tales. People will talk. Besides, if he were lookin' out for a Missus MacSweeny, I reckon he'd go after widders. Ain't he a widderer hisself?"

"That don't follow," said Mary.

"Don't it? Then it ort!" retorted Tom.

"There—don't be snuffy wi' me!" said Mary.

The getting up of a suitable tree and its transport

to the cottage of the Mauduits was not a matter of two minutes, nor of half-an-hour.

Tom was aware that Isabella would have been kept waiting, but he relieved his mind with the consideration that she would take it for granted that he was detained by some business, and would walk on alone to the Hall; the distance was trifling. He could explain matters when he arrived, and she would at once understand the circumstances.

"I don't see how you're going to stick them candle ends on to the branches," said Tom.

"I shall heat hairpins and run 'em through."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Mountstephen desirively; "and when the candles be burnin' the flame'll heat the hairpins red-hot, and they'll melt the composite, and there'll be a pretty mess, and the candle ends falling about on all sides and firing everything! I hope you're insured!"

"I can manage it."

"No, you can't, excuse me, Polly. I reckon mother at home has got some bits of tapers from the Parsonage tree last year. Her was up there helping, and they throwed the tree away when done with; and her's a saving woman and can't abide no waste, and I know her pulled off and kept the remains of candles. They have wires for fastening of them on. If you don't mind my leaving that collar here—you won't let nothin' damage it, nor let the cat get at it, will you, Polly?—I'll run home and see what mother have got. I couldn't run in that collar; 'twould be sheer impossible!"

So, instead of going on to the Hall, here was another detention. But Tom was a good-natured lad ; he was not *needed* at the Hall, and here at the cottage he was of real assistance.

After the young man had been away nearly a quarter of an hour, he returned with a small box full of portions of tapers, and some entire, and sundry little sparkling ornaments that had furnished the tree the preceding Christmas, and had been cast aside, but saved by the prudent and frugal Mrs. Mountstephen.

"And here, Polly," said Tom, "here's a spotted dog in china, as stood on my mantelshelf, that little Bessie be welcome to. You can set it under the tree. Now I'll clap the tree mores into a tub, and then I'm off to the Hall."

When Tom, reinvested in collar and coat, arrived at the Lodge and inquired for Isabella, he learnt, which did not much surprise him, that she had gone forward. So he went to the Hall by himself, not greatly concerned at being late. He knew that all who were invited would not be able to arrive punctually. There would be two "sitting-downs" to supper, and he would be in time for the second.

When he arrived, he looked about him for Isabella, and saw her seated beside the Scotch gardener, who was helping her to trifle.

With a little difficulty he made his way behind the chairs, in and out among the servants who were waiting on the guests, to where Isabella was dipping into the trifle.

"So sorry, Bella; I couldn't help it," said he.

"De-li-ci-ous!" said Bella.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was speaking to Mr. MacSweeny."

"I only want to say that I was unavoidably detained."

"The jam is strawberry," said Bella.

"Whole strawberries, from our own garden," said MacSweeny.

"I'm very fond of strawberries," observed Bella.

"So am I," said the Scotch gardener. "Have some more. I'll remember you in the strawberry time and send you up the first dish I ripen. Of course, I ripen 'em early—in the greenhouse. You shall have some—as soon as they are fit to be picked."

"How good of you, Mr. MacSweeny!"

"Not at all; I live but to oblige, and *you*"—he looked round at her—"for you I would do anything."

"Bella," said Tom over her chair, "I really could not help it."

"Will you please to move, Mr. Mountstephen; you are jogging my chair."

"Do you like grapes?" asked MacSweeny. "I rather flatter myself on my grapes. I am able to keep them, too, so well. My large white Muscats—but there, you shall have some. I'll send you up a really choice bunch. I think the second sitters down are coming in now. Miss Isabella, if you have done, we will rise and let the others take our

places. Here, you, Mountstephen, can have my seat. If you have brought Mary Mauduit I have no doubt she can have Miss Frowd's chair."

Poor Tom did not enjoy his supper, and that over, when he sought Isabella to tender his excuses, she deliberately turned her back on him. It was clear MacSweeny had made mischief. He had told her that for the sake of that pale Polly Mauduit he had neglected to fulfil his engagement and keep his appointment.

Dancing began, and Bella sat out with the Scotch gardener, who was too serious a man to approve of the light fantastic toe; as he explained to Bella it was against his principles—"but don't let that interfere with your enjoyment, if you wish to go to Mr. Mountstephen."

"Oh! not at all!" said Miss Frowd.

Huffed, hurt, poor Tom withdrew. He slunk away from the Hall. Among so many, he would not be missed, and of enjoyment there was none after his rebuff. It would madden him to see how Bella "carried on" with the Scotchman.

He walked through the park, groaning, grumbling, resentful. He was not angry with himself for not keeping his appointment, nor with Polly for having detained him; but with Bella, whom he designated as a minx, and with MacSweeny, whom he termed a widdered Scottish rogue.

He left the park; he walked hastily on. Then, finding that in the agitation of his feelings he could not keep his head in one position, and that he was

consequently liable to cut his throat, he halted, and took off his collar, and fastened it by the stud round his left arm above the elbow.

Presently he reached the cottage of the Mauduits, and he could see through the little window that the tree was alight; it twinkled through the panes. The temptation to turn aside, rap at the door, and enter was not to be resisted.

To his knock he received an answer, as he opened the door. The answer came from an inner room.

"It be I, Polly," called Tom. "Just passin', and want to see how Bessie be enjoyin' of herself."

"Come in—come in, Tom."

The young man strode through the kitchen into the adjoining chamber. There lay, in her bed, the sick girl, a lovely child, with large burning dark eyes, and a hectic flame in her cheeks. She was supported in the arms of her sister, and was looking with delight at the little candles, at the oranges, and the glittering tin ornaments.

"Tom," said Mary, "Bessie do thank you so for the spotted dog."

"Yes, I do," said the sick child, striving to lift herself and extend a hand to the young gardener.

"But, gracious me, Tom!" exclaimed Mary, "whatever is the meaning o' that?" pointing to the white band round his arm. "It is like what folks put on now when in mourning—only it's white."

"He's going to be married," said the sick child.

"It is only that stiff collar; I couldn't abear it no longer!" explained Tom.

Then the child laughed, and laughed till she coughed.

Suddenly Mary uttered a cry—Tom saw a crimson stream.

"Run, run, Tom! For Heaven's sake run for the doctor!"

And Tom ran.

In half-an-hour he returned.

Polly was kneeling by the bed. On it lay the child, the face almost white, but yet with a little colour in the delicate cheek. Her hand held tightly that of her sister.

The doctor had not come; he was out; would not be back till morning.

Tom could not explain this; and he knew, moreover, that the surgeon could effect nothing. Without a word he knelt also by the child's bedside. The candles were quivering to extinction on the Christmas tree. One was guttering, and sending a stream of wax over the head of the spotted dog. Then another fell twinkling through the boughs and went out. And at the same time the light went out in Bessie's eyes.

A few days later, when the earth had closed over the child, Tom was speaking with Mary, and she said to him: "Tom, I think now I should like that Christmas tree to be planted on the little maid's grave. Will you oblige me by doing it?"

Then, after wiping her eyes: "Tom, that is a Tree of Death."

The head-gardener triumphantly carried away Bella; the marriage took place within six weeks of the Christmas supper and dance. Isabella Frowd had become Mrs. Sandy MacSweeny, and was planted in the gardener's beautiful cottage. But in all things human there comes a change. Within a very short time certain matters started to light. What these were you shall hear from the squire's own lips, as he addressed Tom Mountstephen.

"Tom," said the squire, his broad, rosy face very hot and agitated, "Tom, I've bundled MacSweeny off. I don't see why I should have to buy the fruit I grow from the greengrocer in our market town. I don't see why, if I purchase bulbs and greenhouse plants, they should invariably disappear, and be reported to have died. I don't see why, if I buy flower seeds, they should come up in other folks' gardens. I have not been able to get fruit for my table without sending to town to buy it. I have been ruined in procuring vast supplies of choice plants from nurserymen, and have not enjoyed them. MacSweeny is off. Hang it! you may not be a professional, and AI, and all that, but you are honest as daylight. I feel I can trust you, and—dash my buttons!—there is the situation vacant for you, if you choose to have it. And there is the cottage—the only disadvantage

is that it is too large for you, and you are unmarried."

"Oh, as to that, sir, that is easily remedied. I be just now on my way to the pass'n to get him to have Mary and me asked next Sunday."

"Mary—Mary who?"

"Mary Mauduit, sir."

"Oh, oh! I wish you joy. An excellent girl! There it is for you—the house, Tom; you and Mary shall go into it as soon as I have seen the back of MacSweeny and his Bella, and have had it whitewashed. And—hang it! Tom, here—come round to my study, and I'll give you a cheque for ten pounds towards the furnishing."

"I thank you, sir; I thank you with all my heart."

"No need of thanks, Tom! Bless my soul, when a master has a trustworthy, honest servant, it is he is to be counted lucky; and unless he is an ass he will keep him. There—come round to the study."

.

And now nearly two years have passed. And this time we see a little party coming out of the church porch. As I live! it is Tom with Mary—no longer Mauduit, but Mountstephen. But they are not alone; there is a baby in a long white robe being brought forth—a babe that had been carried into church to be christened.

As Mary stood in the autumn sunlight outside the porch, she touched Tom's arm, and said—

"Let us go to little Bessie's grave."

And they went, and the baby was taken there also, over the drooping grass, wet with autumn rains.

"The poor little Christmas tree," said Mary, "although a Tree of Death, lives. See—how hearty it appears!"

"It is no Tree of Death," answered Tom. "See—here is the first fir-cone; it is alive, and bears seed. It is no Tree of Death, but a Tree of Life."

Then Tom laughed.

"Mary," said he, "I think for once in my life I've said a good thing."

But Mary did not applaud.

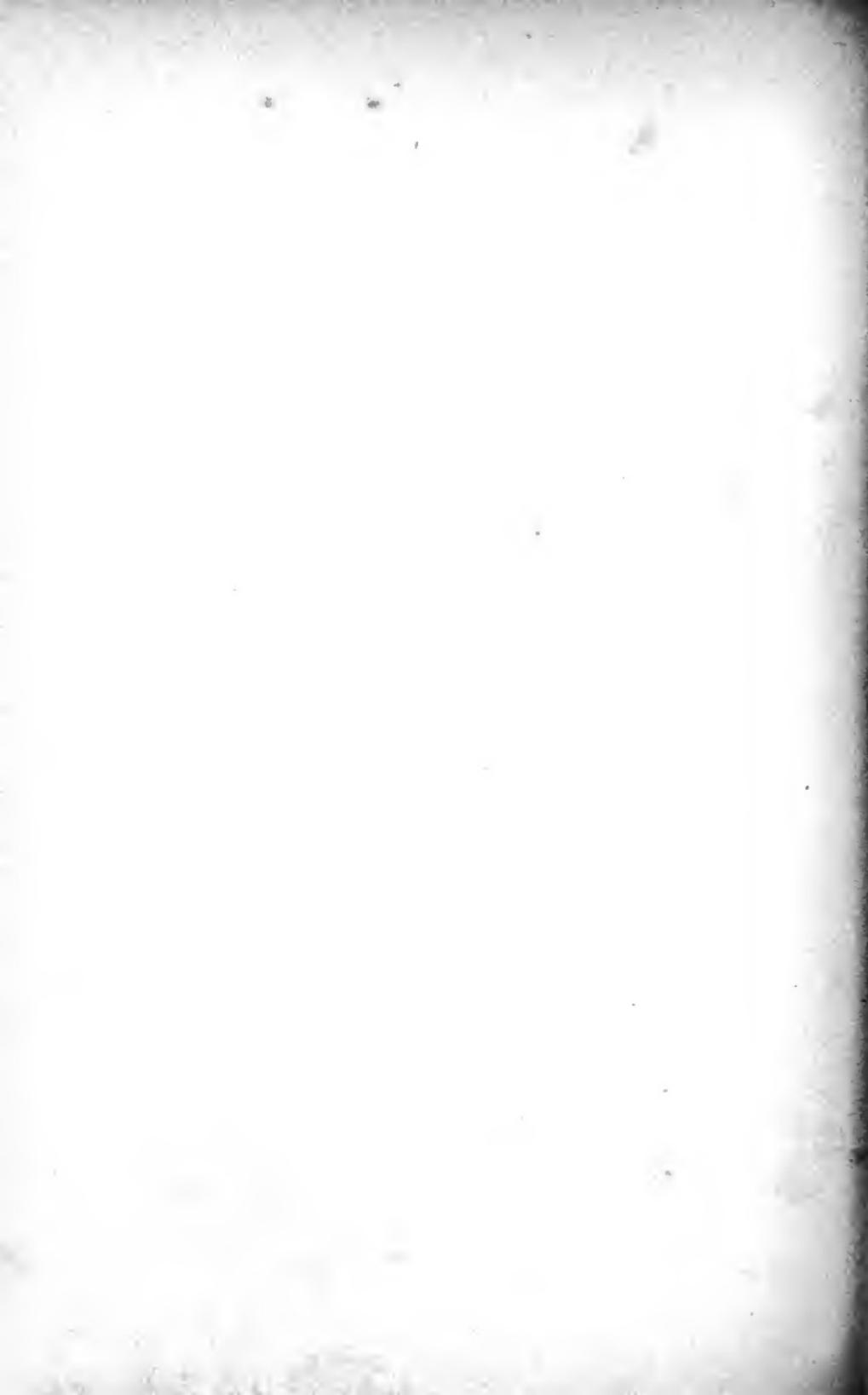
"Tom, do you think the little fir-cone really has life in it?"

"Of course it has."

Mary picked it, and then put it into the tiny hand of the baby.

"Look, Tom," she said. "But for that Christmas tree you and I would never have become what we are to each other—and now, in it is the seed of life, and so on and on and on for evermore. Our baby has it, and it shall be sown, and so—really, Tom, there seems to be no end to life; it goes on for ever and for ever!"

"Amen," responded Tom.



FOLK-PRAYERS



FOLK-PRAYERS

IT is a singular fact, but fact it is, that very little of what may be termed peculiarly Romish superstition lingers among the peasantry of England ; this goes far to show how very little hold such superstition had on their minds or hearts. It may be almost said that there is more of pre-Christian paganism, of usages condemned by the Catholic Church surviving, than of any practices recommended by her.

I do know, indeed, of one instance of a Cornish Methodist, who, when unable to attend his distant chapel, resorted to a rude granite cross of Brito-Roman date, and there said his prayers ; but even in this case one cannot be certain that there did not linger on a reverence for the stone itself, which had been a prehistoric menhir before it was sanctified by being chipped into the sign of our salvation.

In Yorkshire, Milly (my Lady) boxes are carried about by children at Christmas : these are cradles containing dolls, one to represent the Virgin Mother, another the Divine Child ; and the grocers send candles to their customers on Christmas Eve, for

the lights to be burned at the Midnight Mass. But such usages are few, and have almost wholly lost their meaning, were never more than folk customs, and were never inculcated by the Church before the Reformation. The midsummer bonfires, the Yule log, the mumming at Christmas, the May-pole, the November "soul-cakes," the "sin-eating" at funerals, and a thousand other customs are purely heathen survivals. The writer knew of a case in Yorkshire of a man who was buried in his coffin with a candle "to light him on his way to Jerusalem" and a penny "to pay the toll," altogether a pagan reminiscence; but has never in all his experience come across any practice connected with the doctrine of purgatory, one insisted upon with immense emphasis before the Reformation, as the saying of masses for the dead brought in a large revenue for the clergy.

Superstition connected with holy wells is heathen, and was given a reluctant sanction by the Roman Church, because so deep-rooted that the people could not be weaned from it.

The custom, so common in the time of our youth, of drinking healths was a pagan one; the dead were thus saluted silently, and the Bishop of Cork in 1713 charged against it in an address to his diocese. He was answered by "A Country Curate of Ireland," and the bishop returned to the charge in a pamphlet of two hundred and twenty pages.

In Germany, to gloss the heathenism of the

custom, it was usual to drink the first cup to the memory of some saint, usually St. Gertrude, the patroness of the dead, who had stepped into the place of the Goddess Holda or Perchta.

But it is chiefly in the prayers used by the illiterate and poor among the peasantry that we would expect to find some trace of Catholicism, for the prayer employed in private and secret is precisely where no interference could affect the convictions and habits formed by ages, and communicated traditionally at the most impressible age.

Now what do we find actually? That the only prayers used by tens of thousands, only now very slowly being driven out by the Lord's Prayer, or being abandoned because all prayer is given up, are not a Catholic reminiscence at all, but an heretical one condemned by the Papal Church.

The reader will at once know what the form is to which reference is made.

“Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Four posties to my bed.
Six angels are outspread,
Two to bottom, two to head,
One to watch me whilst I pray,
One to bear my soul away.”

This is the usual form; but there are verbal variations. Sometimes it stands “four corners” instead of “four posties,” and “two at the feet,

and two at the head." After the first two lines that are invariable, we have—

"Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
One to read and one to write,
Two to guard my bed at night ;"

or—

"One to watch and two to pray,
One to keep all fears away."

A much fuller form of the prayer comes from an old woman of near ninety years at Tavistock :—

"Monday morning—a new week begin,
Christ deliver our souls from sin.
Tuesday morning—nor curse nor swear,
Christ's body for it will tear.
Wednesday morning—midst of the week,
Woe to the soul Christ does not seek.
Thursday morning—Saint Peter wrote,
'Joy to the soul that heaven hath bote.'
Friday—Christ died on the Holy Tree,
To save other men as well as me.
Saturday—six—the evening dead.
Sunday—the books are all outspread.
God is the Branch. I am the flower.
Pray God send me that blessed hour.
Whether I be by sea or by land,
The Lord, sweet Jesus, on my right hand.
I go to bed, my sleep to take,
The Lord doth know if I shall wake.
Sleep I ever, sleep I never,
God receive my soul for ever.
Four corners to my bed,
Four angels lie outspread,
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on."

This is very curious. One may well ask where St. Peter wrote the quotation given in the eighth line. "That heaven hath bote" signifies "that hath bid or prayed for heaven."

The prayer, or formula, is very old. In the "Towneley Mysteries," belonging to the beginning of the sixteenth century at the very latest date that can be given, for they are sacred Mysteries which ceased to be performed after the Reformation, in the scene where the shepherds keep their watch by night on the eve of the Nativity, the third shepherd says—

"For ferd we be fryght a crosse let uskest
 Cryst crosse, benedyght, east and west,
 For dreede
 Jesus of Nazorous
 Crucyefix us,
 Marcus, Andreas,
 God be our spedē."

In the second scene of the *Shepherds* the second pastor says—

"I wylle lye downe by
 For I must slepe truly."

The third says:—

"As good a man's son was I
 As any of you,
 Bot Mark, come heder, between shalle gin lye downe."

Mark says—

"Then myght I lett you bedene ; if that
 you wold rowne.
 No drede

Fro my top to my too,
 Manus tuas commendo
 Poncio Pilato
 Cryst cross me spedē."

Certainly a very odd form of commendation of the soul, and a variant on that of the third shepherd.

Launcelot Sharpe, in his remarks on the "Towneley Mysteries" (*Archæol.*, 1838), gives "the rural charm which, when a boy, I have often heard in Kent:—

' Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
 Guard the bed that I lie on.
 Four corners to my bed,
 Four angels round my head.
 Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
 Guard the bed that I lie on.'"

Ady, in his "Candle in the Dark, or Treatise concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft," Lond., 1656, says, "An old woman in Essex who was living in my time, she had lived also in Queen Mary's time, and had learned thence many popish charms, one whereof was this: every night when she lay down to sleep she charmed her bed, saying—

' Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
 The bed be blest that I lye on.'

And this she would repeat three times, reposing great confidence therein, because (as she said) she had been taught it when she was a young maid by the churchmen of those times."

In a MS. collection of notes on superstitions

made by John Aubrey, which is in the British Museum, Aubrey enters—

"A PRAYER USED WHEN THEY WENT TO BED.

" Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
 Bless the bed that I lie on,
 And blessed guardian angels keep
 Me safe from dangers whilst I sleep."

Aubrey adds, "I remember before the civil wars people when they heard the clock strike were wont to say, 'God grant that my last howre may be my best howre.' "

Robert Chambers, in his "Popular Rhymes of Scotland," does not speak of this prayer as used north of the Tweed at bed-time, but says: "A curious instance of far-descended nonsense is to be found in another puerile rhyme :—

' Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,
 Haud the horse till I loup on ;
 Haud it fast, and haud it sure,
 Till I get over the misty muir.'

Boys in Scotland say this in the course of their rollicking sports."

This singular charm, rather than prayer, is given in a mediæval magical treatise, "The Enchiridion of Pope Leo," which was printed at Rome in 1660. It is there called "The White Paternoster," and runs thus in French—

" Petit Patenôtre blanche que Dieu fit, que
 Dieu dit, que Dieu mit en Paradis.
 Au soir m'allant coucher, je trouves trois
 Anges à mon lit couchés, un aux pieds,

Deux au chevet, la bonne Vierge Marie au
 Milieu, qui me dit que je me couchis,
 Que rien ne doutes. . . .
 Qui la dira trois fois au soir, trois fois au
 Matin, gagnera le Paradise à la fin."

Under the name of "The White Paternoster" it is referred to by Chaucer in the "Miller's Tale"—

"Lord Jhesu Crist, and Seynte Benedyht,
 Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
 Fro nyghtes verray, the White Paternoster,
 Where wonestow now, Seynt Petre's soster."

"Nyghtes verray" is probably a night-were, the hobgoblin. "Were" is an old Saxon word for man, and the night-man is the ghost. In White's "Way to the True Church," Lond., 1624, White complains of "the prodigious ignorance" which existed among his parishioners when he entered upon his ministrations. He gives what he considers to be the "White Paternoster," or a form of prayer used before going to bed.

"White Paternoster, Saint Peter's brother,
 What hast i the t'one hand? White booke leaves.
 What hast i th' t'other hand? Heaven gate keys.
 Open heaven gates, and streike hell gates,
 And let every crysan child creepe to its own mother.
 White Paternoster. Amen."

In the first edition of Wynkyn de Worde's "Horæ Beatæ Mariæ Virginis," 1502, a copy now in the Gough Library at Oxford has on the margin, written in a contemporary hand, "The Little Credo," "The White Paternoster," and "The White Bene-

dictus," another very curious magical formula. For an account of this see Dibdin's "Decameron," second day.

The "White Paternoster" is as generally in use among the peasants in France as in England. It takes various forms. In Quercy, part of our English possessions in Guyenne, it is recited nightly under another name, the "Pater d'habitude." The patois may be thus translated :—

" Pater d'habitude,
Our Saviour salute us ;
He is at our head, he is at our feet,
He is now and he is after,
He is in the bed where I lie.
Five angels there I find,
Three at bottom, two at head,
And the mother of God in the midst.
She bids me sleep so sound,
Never fear, nor flames, nor fire,
Nor sudden death at all.
I take our Saviour as my father,
The Virgin Mary as my mother,
Saint John for my cousin,
Saint Michael for my sponsor.
There are god parents four.
Whatever haps, whatever befalls,
I shall go to Paradise."

There are, in fact, in Guyenne four Paternosters—the great one, the small one, the Pater of Nazareth, and the Pater of Habit; and these make up one complete formula. M. Daymard, who has collected the folk-songs of Quercy, the present Department of Lot, says, "Who has not heard some old woman

mutter her prayers in a monotonous voice, without accent, with, however, a sort of rhythmic cadence, like the reading of poetry by children in school?" If in the course of her prayers she be interrupted and questioned relative to what she has said, and asked to repeat it, it is rarely that one can be found to continue her prayers without recommencing the recitation.

"Very often the old women do not understand what they say. They repeat words which anciently were in Latin, Romance, or French, and which, passing from mouth to mouth, have become corrupted till they cease to be comprehensible. Then they have not, as an assistance to their memory, the help of an air and of couplets; consequently they slide away into the greatest confusion. Thus it falls out that the majority of these prayers are long, disconnected, made up of patches ill-stitched together, and without affinity, without transition. There are also set phrases and elements of prayer which recur, and which each pious soul throws into her common prayers without rhyme or reason."

One of the Quercy prayers deserves quotation, because it also is akin to something that was customary in England, the Lykewake Dirge, which is found in Aubrey's MS., already quoted, and was first published by Sir Walter Scott. The Quercy prayer is called "La Barbe-Dieu," *i.e.* Verbum-Dei; *barbe* is a corruption. It runs thus:—

"The Barbe of God—who knows it, and says it not, he will lose his soul. There behind thee lies a

plank, a little plank that's long, not broad. The elect pass over it. The lost fall from it and cry and groan, falling into the abyss of hell. Learn the Barbe of God at seven years old. There is no time for repentance when parted are body and soul."

In a book published at Toulouse in 1673 by the Père Amilha, in the Languedoc patois, entitled "Le Tableau de la bido del parfait Chresten," a popular book of Christian instruction in faith and morals, is a caution against superstitious practices. Among these are the following questions: "Have you tried to make a denier float on the water, whereby to detect the thief who has stolen your goods? Have you taken off the cross from the rosary, and said the Little Pater and the White Pater?"

These prayers, which were supposed to have a power to save from everlasting death by mere recitation of them, are mentioned by J. B. Thiers, in his "Treatise on Superstition," as condemned by the Church; and he names among them the Barbe de Dieu as heretical.

Quenot, in his "Statistique de la Charente," in 1818, gives the form in which the White Paternoster was said in that department of France—

"Dieu l'a fait, je la dit,
J'ai trouvé quatre anges couchés dans mon lit,
Deux à la tête, deux aux pieds,
Et le bon Dieu au milieu."

The forms in which it is said throughout France are infinitely varied, but the same ideas reign

throughout all, and all derived from a common source. That source is apparently Albigensian Manichæism. It seems from the questions put to these heretics that the "Perfect," the apostle of the sect, taught a fourfold Paternoster, and taught it as a sort of charm, with the assertion, which repeatedly occurs in all these folk rhymed Paters, that they who recited it secured thereby their eternal salvation.

It is certainly—if this fourfold Albigensian Pater be the origin of our "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John"—a very curious instance of the underground growth of the heresy throughout Europe, and the hold it obtained on the poor and ignorant.

I give a remarkable instance from Lincolnshire of the glossing over of pagan usage by Christianity. I was furnished with it by the Rev. R. M. Heanley, who wrote:—

"THE VICARAGE,
UPTON GREY, WINCHFIELD,
Nov. 16, 1890.

"DEAR MR. BARING GOULD,—I wonder if you ever came across a case of the following strange survival, which I met with in the Lincolnshire marshes, as a cure for ague. It was in the autumn of 1857 or 1858 that I had taken some quinine to a lad who lived with his old grandmother. On my next visit the old dame scornfully refused another bottle, and said she 'knowed on a soight better cure nor your mucky stuff.' With that she took me round the bottom of the bed and showed me three

horse-shoes nailed there, with a hammer crosswise upon them.

"On my expressing incredulity, she waxed wroth, and said, 'Naay, lad, it's a charm. I takes t' mell (hammer) i' my left haan, and I mashys they shoon thoice, and Oi sez—

'Feyther, Son, and Holi Ghoast,
Naale the devil to this poast,
Throice I stroikes with holi crook,
Wun fur God, and wun fur Wod, and wun fur Lok.'

"Wod is of course Woden, and Lok is the evil-god Loki of Scandinavian mythology."

To return to the White Paternoster. We may well question whether the Manichæan White Paternoster was not a much earlier form of incantation for blessing the bed, given a slightly Christian complexion. For in the Anglo-Saxon laws, in the "Codex Exoniensis," is a most curious formula for blessing a field that has been blasted by witchcraft, and this bears some analogy to the blessing of the bed on which the sleeper is about to lie. According to this Anglo-Saxon authority, all sorts of seeds are cast out on the earth as an oblation to the plough. Then turves of green grass from the four corners of the field are cut in the name of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are carried to the church and four masses said over them, and are replaced at the four corners of the field before sunset, and certain incantations recited over them. At the same

time that the four corners of the field are consecrated to the four evangelists the cross of Christ is signed over the centre, just as in the French forms of the prayer of the bed the Virgin or Christ occupies the centre. One is inclined to suspect that in all this there is a reminiscence of the sun and the four quarters of the heavens, with the deities ruling them.

C R A Z Y J A N E



CRAZY JANE

IN Sussex a great bank of chalk downs stands up as if set as a natural sea-wall against the encroachments of the waves. Nothing can be conceived more barren, more dreary than this bank on its seaward slope. On the east coast of England, in Essex, in Lincoln, in Suffolk and Norfolk, the energy of man has reclaimed tracts of low-lying land from the sea, and has held back the tide by erecting sea-walls that have a long gradually-declining escarpment towards the water. Against these the waves fling themselves, are broken, run up them, lose their force, and sneak back discomfited. On the land side these walls have an abrupt fall. Now the south coast of Sussex seems by nature to have been thus constructed as a great type after which men should build and recover land. About three or four miles inland—perhaps a little more—begins what is called the Weald, a flat, rich, and beautiful land, well wooded, full of sweet villages and gentle pastures, with here and there an undulation, like a fold in green velvet, and here and there a pond occupying a deserted iron quarry. From this Wealden district rises to the south the abrupt scar of the South Downs, a mighty ram-

part of chalk, tilted up with its long easy slope seawards.

Did that mighty primeval ocean rage against the coast where now stand Brighton, Worthing, and Shoreham? Did that great natural sea-wall of chalk restrain its waves and protect the Weald from inundation? We cannot say.

At one point in the summit of the chalk barrier is a trench cut deep through the soft white rock, and this is called the Devil's Dyke. The story told of it is that the enemy of mankind, looking down on the fertile Weald, envied its beauty and richness, and set to work one night to dig through the barrier, so as to let the ocean in, to submerge the fair district. But he could do this only in one night. His power to work evil was limited. If he could make his canal before cock-crow, well; but he might on no account resume the work if left incomplete in one night. Now there was a cottage on the height, and in it lived an old Goodie, who was roused by the sound of digging and delving in the night. The night was dark, dark as Erebus; she opened her casement and peeped forth. Nothing was visible, but the earth quaked under the efforts made by Mephistopheles. Then the Goodie, being an old fool, lit a candle, held it outside the window and screamed out, "Who's there? What are you a-doing?" Now a cock saw the candle, and thinking it was the first glimmer of dawn, began to crow. Then the evil one threw away his spade and fled in a rage. And,

lo! there in the dyke, is shown the half-finished work and the unejected shovelful of earth.

Such is the legend. In reality, no doubt, the dyke is a very ancient aboriginal fortification.

Now mark a wonderful provision of nature. All the rain that falls along the range of chalk hills sinks in, soaks down, and might sink away to—goodness knows where, but that, beneath the chalk lies a bed of very dense clay, through which the water cannot descend, and between the chalk and the clay is strewn a narrow film of gravel, called the greensand, there hardly thicker than your hand. When the water has percolated through the chalk hills and is stopped by the clay, out it runs, on the inland scarp, through the greensand, in a thousand crystal-cool and beautiful springs, thoroughly purified by this perfect natural filter.

On the inland flank of the South Downs, in a little coomb or valley scooped out of the chalk, gushed nine of these springs and fed a tarn or lake, not natural, but formed by an embankment thrown up to form a reservoir for a mill. Above this lake set in the lap of the Downs were clumps of Scotch pines, and a wood of beech, in spring full of the purple and the white scented wood orchis; on the Downs about grew the quaintly beautiful bee-orchis, rare elsewhere save on chalk.

In a solitary cottage under the hill, in a shady spot where the sun rarely came, lived a widow and

her daughter. The widow was very infirm, crippled with rheumatism, and was allowed eighteenpence a week and a loaf by the parish. She was too weak and helpless to earn anything for herself, and she could not have subsisted, she and her child, on eighteenpence and one loaf, had it not been for certain means of acquiring money that the neighbourhood afforded. The South Down chalk hills abound in hedgehogs. They are to be found in burrows in great numbers, and at evening, when the dew is falling, the side of the down may be seen alive with these little creatures scampering about seeking their prey. The widow's girl, Jane, a young girl uncouth in form, with low brow and dull unintelligent eyes, was clever in finding hedgehogs, and these she carried about coiled up in a basket, and sold them to people who were troubled with slugs and snails in their gardens, or with cockroaches and black-beetles in their kitchens. She got a shilling for each hedgehog, and could, had the demand required it, have found a hedgehog *per diem*, which would have brought her in 365 shillings in the year, or £18, 5s. od.—a handsome income. But, unfortunately, the public were not athirst for hedgehogs; and the market was soon glutted. Consequently Jane had to seek other means of earning money. She found dormice in the woods, and as there were two large schools for boys, Hurstpierpoint and Lancing, within a walk, and in schools for boys the passion for the acquisition of dormice is insatiable, "Crazy Jane," as

the dull-witted girl was called, found that she could sell at 4d. each as many dormice as she could find. But then the dormice were only to be caught when hyberinating. In summer they were too wide-awake to allow themselves to be captured.

Another source of revenue was offered by the orchis plants on the Downs. Crazy Jane dug up the roots, collected bunches of the flowers, and trudged with them to Worthing or Brighton, where she was able to dispose of her flowers and of her tubers. Thus, the widow and her daughter had not merely eighteenpence and a loaf to live on, but they lived also on dormice, hedgehogs, and orchis bulbs. She had long distances to go to dispose of her goods had Crazy Jane, but what mattered that to her ? She was sturdily built, strong as a horse, and disregarded all kinds of bad weather. Jane had had no schooling. She had been forced to attend the National School, but had been unable to acquire her letters ; she could not write a pot-hook on the slate, or do any calculations apart from hedgehogs, dormice, and bulbs. In all particulars relative to her business she was keen, keen in exacting every penny, able to reckon up her gains ; but apart from hedgehogs, dormice, and bulbs she could not count and sum. So she had been dismissed her school as mentally incapable of acquiring knowledge. This permission to her to withdraw was a great relief to Jane, for she had been the butt of ridicule to the scholars. Every dunce could crow over Jane as more stupid than himself. The witty

or would-be wags poked fun at her, the malicious tortured and irritated her. Jane was usually good-natured, but when angered flew into paroxysms of mad fury that occasioned merriment to the ill-conditioned, and often provoked the interference of the master. Jane would have come off worse than she did at school had it not been for Jim Thacker, the miller's son at Ninewells, who constituted himself her protector, and thrashed the insolent boys who tormented Crazy Jane, and screened her from their gibes.

This protection he afforded her awoke on the poor dull-witted girl's part the liveliest devotion, a devotion that was irksome to the boy, for she followed him like a dog, shrank behind him at the least threat of annoyance, clung to him when in trouble, and was uneasy when he was out of her sight. This attracted notice in the school, and provoked merriment. She was called Jim Thacker's dog. And like a dog she seemed—faithful, regardful, a little too demonstrative of affection, but exacting nothing for this fidelity but an occasional nod and word. It was a relief to Jim when Crazy Jane was excused school as mentally deficient; and it was a relief to her, because thenceforth she could wander unrestrained over the Downs, hunting hedgehogs and dormice, and picking flowers.

One day—it was in spring—Jim Thacker was walking near the mill pond, when he heard screams of terror and pain, apparently, and saw Crazy Jane

pursued and attacked by the male swan of a pair that lived in the pond. In her search for orchis bulbs she had approached too near where the female swan was sitting on her eggs, and the male in wild fury had flown to the protection of its mate, and considering Jane as an enemy threatening his mate and eggs, had rushed at her with flapping wings and outstretched beak. An excited swan is not a foe to laugh at, the strength of its wings is so great that a blow of them has been known to break the leg of a horse; moreover, with its great beak it can nip and hurt. The flap of the great wings, the discordant notes that issued from the long neck, the menacing bill, had paralysed Jane, and in trying to flee she had stumbled over a root and fallen.

Jim snatched up a pronged stick and ran to her aid, calling to the swan. He reached her as the bird was driving at her with his bill, and thrusting the fork adroitly under the neck, held the angry bird back.

"Now Jane," said he, "get up and run away whilst I keep the swan at bay."

But she was so bewildered with her fright that it was some time before she could understand what to do, and when, finally, she did scramble away, she had not the strength and breath to go far, but sank among the old leaves at a little distance from the pool, sobbing, trembling, with her black hair scattered about her shoulders and face.

Jim came to her and helped her to her feet,

brought her to the mill, and there his mother soothed the fears of the frightened girl, gave her milk and bread and honey, and finally dismissed her with a sixpence in her pocket.

After this, Crazy Jane became somewhat of a nuisance again, as she had been at the school. She had come to regard Jim with a veneration that almost reached adoration. He was the only person who had ever stood up for her and defended her against enemies. He had never laughed at her, played tricks with her, teased her; but had ever been ready to come to her aid when powerless to protect herself. She hung about the mill, not for milk and bread and honey, not for a sixpence, but only that she might get a sight of Jim, and receive a kind and cheery word from him. She would have overwhelmed him with hedgehogs had he been willing to have one, would have filled his boxes with dormice had he expressed the desire to have them. There was nothing she would not do for him to show her gratitude and regard. And Jim's mother, Mrs. Thacker, made use of the girl now and then to take messages or do commissions for her to Steyning, or to Hurst, or to Brighton, or Worthing—commissions which she executed with fidelity, and for which she doggedly, even sullenly, refused payment. It was reward enough to her to be allowed to see Jim, and to hear him say, "What an active girl you are, Jane!"

On Sundays, when Jim went to church, Jane

was always to be seen hanging about in the neighbourhood of the mill, waiting to follow him. She was in her ragged, dingy week-day dress, for she had no change of attire. And when he started, with his book under his arm, she followed at a distance, and when he entered the sacred building she remained outside, hidden behind one of the gravestones, for she dared not stay seated on the churchyard wall, lest she should be teased, and perhaps pulled off, and have stones thrown at her by those boys and young men who congregate about churchyard gates, and do not enter the church.

When service was over, and Jim returned home, then, from her hiding-place, rose the crazy girl also, and followed him back, never getting very near, always maintaining a respectful distance, but never allowing him to get out of her sight.

This, naturally, provoked comment, and caused Jim annoyance. He spoke to Jane about it, remonstrated, and forbade her to pursue him in this manner. This made her cry, but not abandon the practice, and he was finally obliged to endure what could not be altered, hoping that in course of time she would herself tire of the dog-like pursuit.

But he was mistaken. For her dull mind this allegiance to Jim, expressed so uncouthly, had become a sort of religion that bound her, and years passed, and her conduct remained the same ; she neither pressed further on his attention nor wearied

of her devotion. The habit of following him, of hanging about the mill, had become part of her life, with which she could not break. So time passed. Jim had grown from boyhood to manhood, and had become miller in the room of his father, deceased; and there had been changes in the cottage also; the widow was dead, and Jane remained there lonely, but content, pursuing her usual avocations, and obtaining a small allowance from the parish. She had grown from girlhood into womanhood, but without any mental development. She was as dull-witted as ever, and in addition had acquired a jerky motion of her head and shoulders whenever spoken to—a nervous agitation which was but St. Vitus' dance. A quiet harmless girl she remained. There was a talk about removing her to the workhouse, but the project fortunately for her was never carried out. She would have pined and died under the restraints and routine of the Union.

In due time Jim Thacker was married. He had fallen in love with a bright, sharp, pretty girl, the daughter of a farmer. There was no impediment on either side, and they were married. Few were better pleased than Crazy Jane, who went to the church, but did not enter it, and looked on, laughing and clapping her hands from behind a gravestone, when the bridal party left the church.

"Oh fine! fine!" exclaimed Jane. "Now Jim Thacker has got a pretty wife. Fine! fine! fine!"

And when Jim sent her some of the wedding feast, cake and oranges and pie, she capered and laughed and cried alternately, and then, all at once, sat herself down in the wood, and a mood of sulkiness and sadness came over her, she knew not wherefore, and she threw up the old brown beech leaves over her head, and let them rain about her, as though she were burying herself under the fallen leaves.

This mood lasted for a day only, and then passed. She remained as before, good-natured, following Jim as a dog, but never intruding herself on him and his young wife.

The latter did not take kindly to Jane. She was annoyed at the persistent haunting of the neighbourhood of the mill, by her animal-like devotion to Jim, and remonstrated with her husband.

"What can I do?" he asked; "the poor crazy creature does no harm."

"It is absurd, it is scandalous," said the young wife petulantly. "It makes you an object of ridicule throughout the country."

Jim's mother, and after her death, Jim himself, had often sent broken meat, a blanket, some little comfort, perhaps a few bushels of coal to Crazy Jane; but the new mistress at the mill forbade these charities. "Let her be starved out," she said. "The creature is a nuisance. Who can be confident with a mad woman so near? She may set fire to the mill, she may murder me, if I go alone into the woods. And"—she pouted—"I should not be

surprised if she were to attempt it, as she is jealous of me. She has hitherto engrossed so much of Jim's attention, and now thinks I rob her of what should be hers."

"How can you talk such trash?" said Jim, annoyed.

So Crazy Jane was the occasion of the first little disagreement between Jim and his wife.

It is a satisfaction to some natures to have an opportunity for grumbling, an excuse for venting their vexation. Mrs. Thacker had a fretful, irritable temper, and the presence of Crazy Jane furnished her with an occasion for giving tongue to her annoyance, and scolding and finding fault with her husband. She knew perfectly that she had no real grounds for her jealousy, and the fact that she knew this excused her in her own mind for her fretfulness towards her husband on the subject. Some women regard their ebullitions of ill-temper and jealousy as justified by the fact that they are unreasonable. Jim was so good-natured that he did not become angry, and his good-nature provoked his wife.

So time passed, and Mrs. Thacker bore her husband a little daughter; and the child grew, and as it grew became an object of intense, affectionate regard to Crazy Jane. Indeed, it seemed as though her devotion to Jim had been transferred to the child. She hovered about the mill as before, but now, so that she might watch the child, not the father, and seemed quite pleased when she could

offer the little girl a bunch of wild strawberries, or a posy of lilies of the valley.

This also gave annoyance to Mrs. Thacker. She did not like her child to be near the mad girl—or woman—she was a girl no longer. “Who can say what she might do? She might carry her off, as the gipsies do?”

“But where could she carry her to?”

“I don’t like her to touch the child; she is not clean.”

Time advanced. It seemed to stand still only with Crazy Jane, who had settled into one fixed type of face and figure that never altered; and no one looking at her could guess her age. Her face was childlike, so simple; but her figure was too formed for that of a child. Her black hair showed no trace of change. In spite of the many vexations occasioned her by Mrs. Thacker, she remained in the cottage. The miller’s wife went to the parish guardians to complain, and urge that the creature should be removed to the Union. She went to the police, to complain that the girl was a menace to herself and the child. She visited the village doctor, to insist that Jane was mad, and ought to be in an asylum; she endeavoured to incite the rector to take steps to get her put into some charitable institution; she had repeated squabbles with her husband—all in vain.

Time advanced, and when little Mabel, his child, was twelve years old, Crazy Jane was still in the cottage unmolested. One winter’s day, Mabel had

been sent over the downs, a walk of three miles, to her grandmother's house, the mother of Mrs. Thacker. It was the old lady's birthday, and the child had gone with congratulations and a present from the miller's wife.

The day had been warm and fine, but towards afternoon there ensued a sudden change, and unexpectedly the wind shifted to the north-east, with black and threatening clouds, and there fell a blinding, dense snow.

A little uneasiness was felt by James and his wife about the child, but not much, for they concluded that Mabel had been detained by her grandmother. "Surely," said Mrs. Thacker, "my mother would never let the child start when there was a threat of a change."

"But the threat came with the change, at once; no one could have looked for it."

"If that be the case, you or some one had better go to my mother's and inquire."

Jim Thacker thought so as well. He drew on his thick coat, tied a kerchief over his head to hold on his cap, for the wind on the downs blew a gale, and started.

Three hours later he returned, covered with snow.

"Is Mabel home?" he inquired as he entered the room.

"No—had she left?" Mrs. Thacker was near on fainting. She saw by her husband's face that he was alarmed.

"Yes," he answered gravely. "She left her grandmother's before the change."

"O Jim! Jim!" The poor mother could say no more, but burst into tears, and sank with her head on the table.

There was no time to be wasted in lamentations. Jim called to his man. A lantern was lighted, and the two with sticks went forth again into the storm. Meantime the darkness had become complete. The wind raged, the snow fell in huge flakes against the windows like dabs of plaster. It covered roof, ground, walls. Mrs. Thacker was left alone in the house with a maid only. Her agitation, her alarm, were great. She loved her child passionately. How could a child struggle through such a storm and beat a way through the snow? Every road was deep buried, the landmarks obscured. The child would stray on the Downs, perhaps sink with weariness, and sleep the fatal sleep of death; perhaps in its wanderings come, blinded with snow, to the edge of a chalk quarry, fall over, and be dashed to pieces.

The night wore on. The father, with his man, had gone over the ground again between the farmhouse where lived the mother of his wife and his own mill, but had discovered no traces of his little one. He called up men from a cottage or two that he passed. He got help from the farm to which the child had gone. As the hours passed he became more hopeless. He expected one thing only—to find his child's body, for he deemed it impossible

for her to be alive under the circumstances. If she had strayed on the Wold, there was no house on the Downs into which she could have been received.

The condition of mind of Mrs. Thacker was worse than that of her husband. He was battling with the storm, searching; she was condemned to inactivity, could only bow and pray, have hot water ready, bricks heated, in the event of her child's return, to bathe her, to place against her body to restore heat.

Once she was frightened. She heard a crash against the front door, a blow that near beat it in, and then all was still. What was it? Dare she open? Then she supposed there had been a fall of a mass of snow from the roof, and that this had produced the sound. Ten minutes later she heard voices—her husband and the men returning—and she ran to the door to throw it open, and ask news. As she did so, something—a great heap of snow, but something tender, something on which the snow had heaped itself, fell inwards.

A cry! Mrs. Thacker stooped, Jim ran up with the lantern. It was Crazy Jane, with the child in her arms. The child asleep, and Jane—dead.

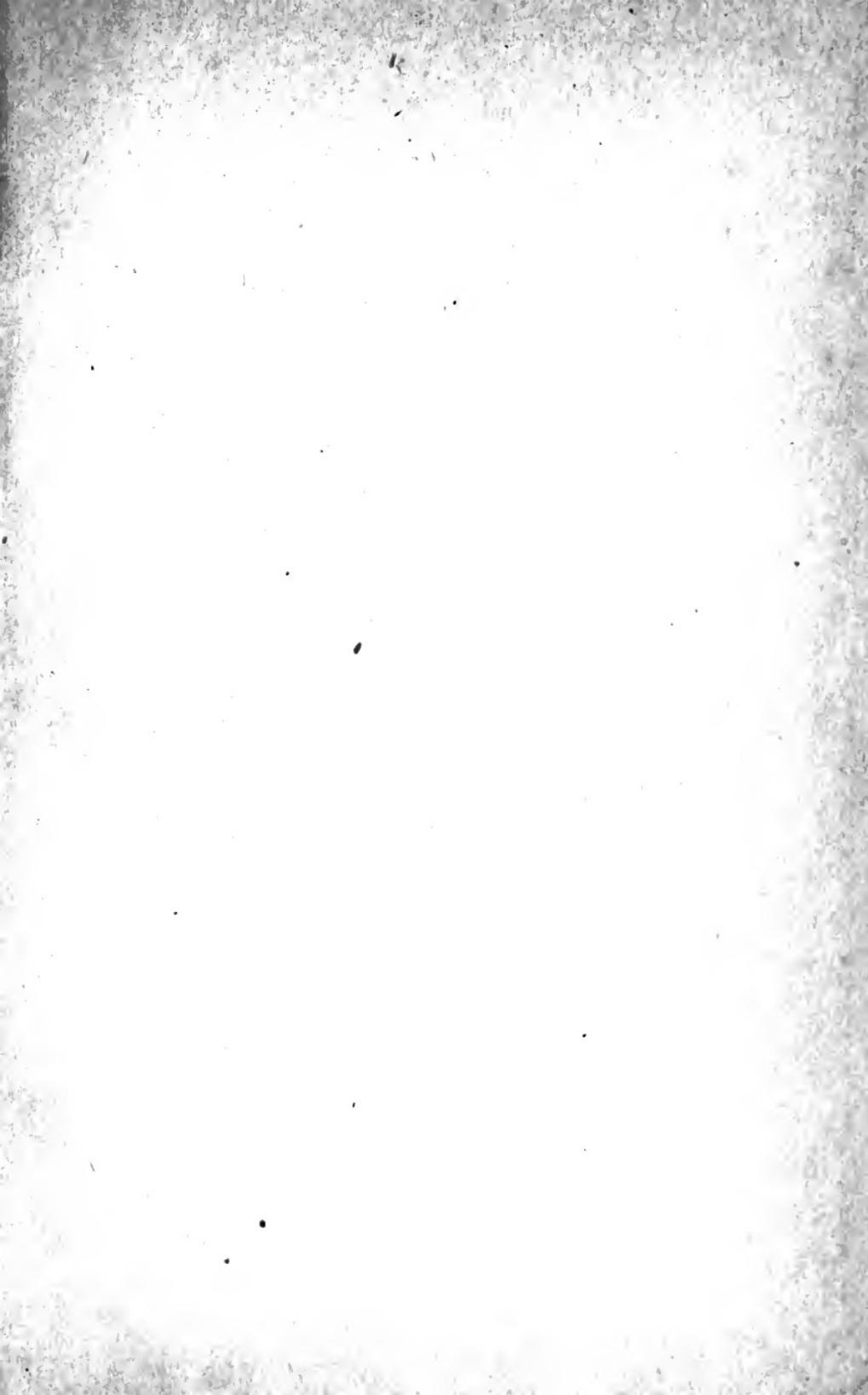
How and where the silly girl had found Mabel was never known. All the child could remember was, that Jane had discovered her as she rambled about in the snow, and that Jane had carried her till she fell asleep. How far Jane had wandered, how far borne the heavy burden, could not be told,

but it must have been far, for she had died of over-exhaustion at the very moment when she had reached the door of the house, the outside of which she had watched for many years, the inside of which she had not been allowed for long to enter.

And so—faithful to the last—the poor dull-minded creature had repaid in good measure, pressed down and running over, the little acts of kindness shown her in years gone by, by Jim at school, and Jim by the pool, and Jim at home, defending her from children, from the swan, and last, but not least, from his wife.

THE END

X



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